MARVEL®

YEAR IN REVIEW 2000-2001

FANBOYS AND BADGIRLS

BLADES & CAPES

MARVEL ADVENTURE

BY **JIM McLAUCHLIN**

From interviews and excerpts from Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas

BILL & JOE'S MARVELOUS ADVENTURE

As indicated by its possessing one of the longest titles in Marvel history, the book you hold is a unique and very special commemoration of an amazing era in the history of the House of Ideas. A dark age ended in the summer of 2000, replaced by an invigorating time of growth, new ideas, and unbridled enthusiasm.

Marvel, a company criticized over the last decade as being the House of Bad Ideas (to name just one of the more harmless epithets), has surpassed anyone's expectations and turned its business around 180 degrees. Things changed so quickly, Marvel CEO Peter Cuneo, in his address to employees at the Christmas, 2001 luncheon, was moved to say, "[Marvel is] not the wonder of the publishing world, but, rather, the entire business world!"

And this is the story of how it happened, as recorded by author Jim McLauchlin over a marathon two-day interview session with the catalysts for this turnaround: Marvel President & COO Bill Jemas and Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. Oh, and in the event that you are one of the uninitiated readers who may not know about our crazy world, here is a short key to help you understand what we're talking about (in alphabetical order):

AOL COMICS = Bill Jemas's pet name for Marvel's chief competitor, DC Comics, which happens to be owned by AOL. By the way, in case anyone's mad at Jim for this, he wants it clear that this is Bill's pet name, not his.

BADGIRLS = Strong female lead characters who like to dress in either very tight or very little clothing for inexplicable reasons.

CODE (sometimes happily referred to as, "non-code") = The Comics Code Authority, a group established by comics publishers to censor comics in the United States.

COLLECTED EDITION / TPB = a reprint of numerous existing comic books in a single volume, functioning as a novel or longer story.

CONTINUITY = the published history that stitches together all Marvel comics — taken to an extreme, it's a very bad thing, as it leads you to do comics only about other comics. This is in opposition to the traditional Marvel philosophy, which is to discuss real-world issues first and foremost.

DIAMOND / DIAMOND COMICS DISTRIBUTION = The exclusive sales agent for Marvel Comics, and (by far) the industry's largest comic book distributor.

EIC (sometimes known as "EEK!") = Editor in Chief Joe Quesada

THE HOUSE / HOUSE OF IDEAS = Marvel, Marvel Comics, Marvel Enterprises, etc.

JMS = J. Michael Straczynski, the writer of *Amazing Spider-Man* and the creator of TV's *Babylon 5*.

Continued on back cover flap...

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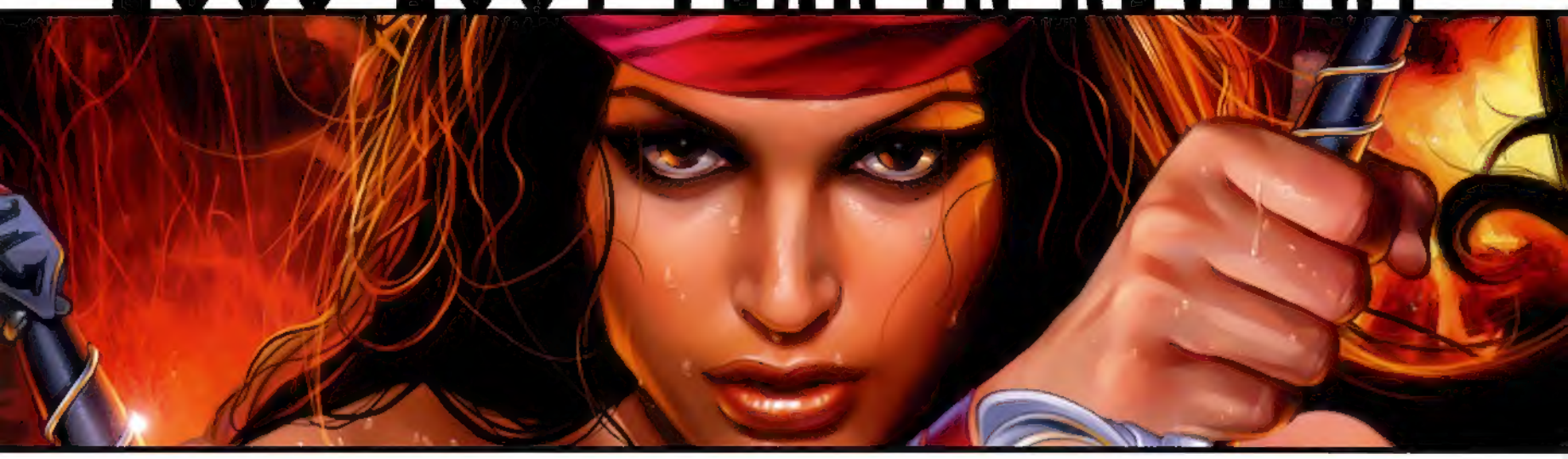
YEAR IN REVIEW 2000-2001

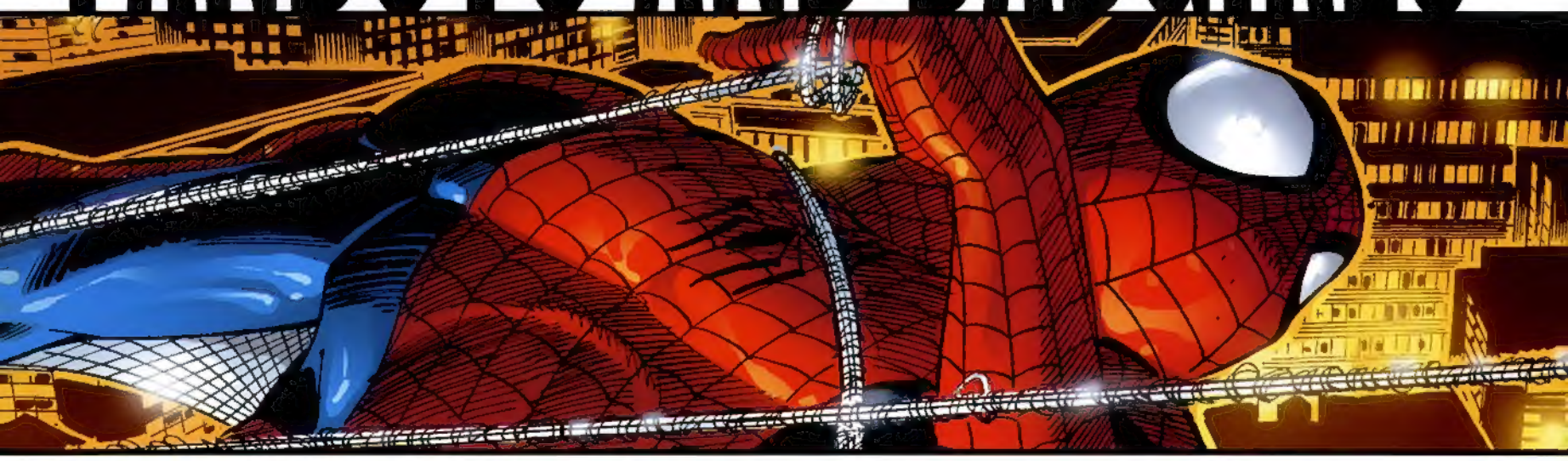
FANBOYS AND BADGIRLS

BILL & JOE'S MARVEL-OUS ADVENTURE!

2000-2001 YEAR IN REVIEW:



FANBOYS AND BADGIRLS



BILL & JOE'S MARVELOUS ADVENTURE

BY **JIM McLAUCHLIN**

From interviews and excerpts from Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas

Reference materials used in researching this volume came from the comic book news website Newsarama.com.

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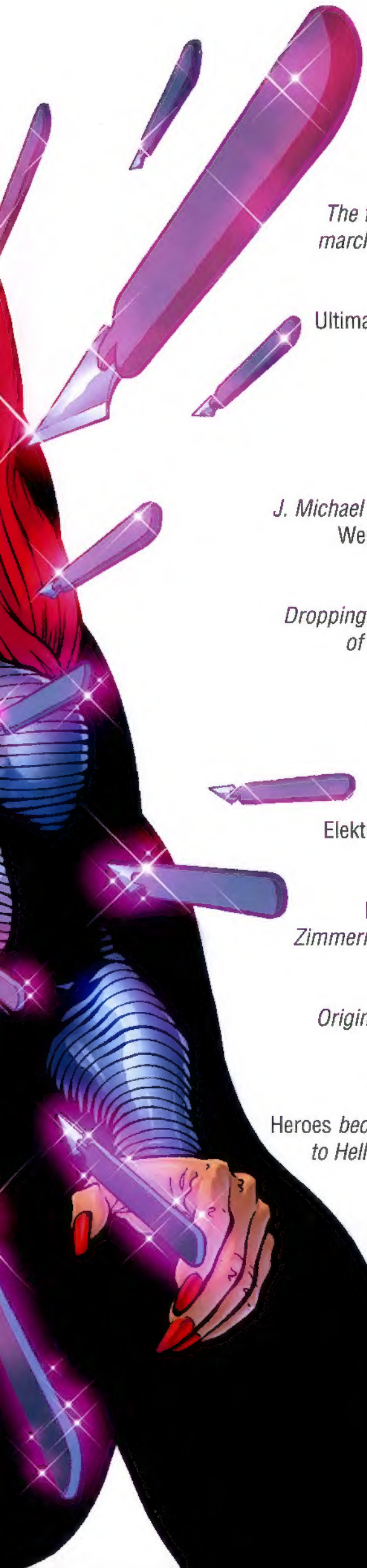

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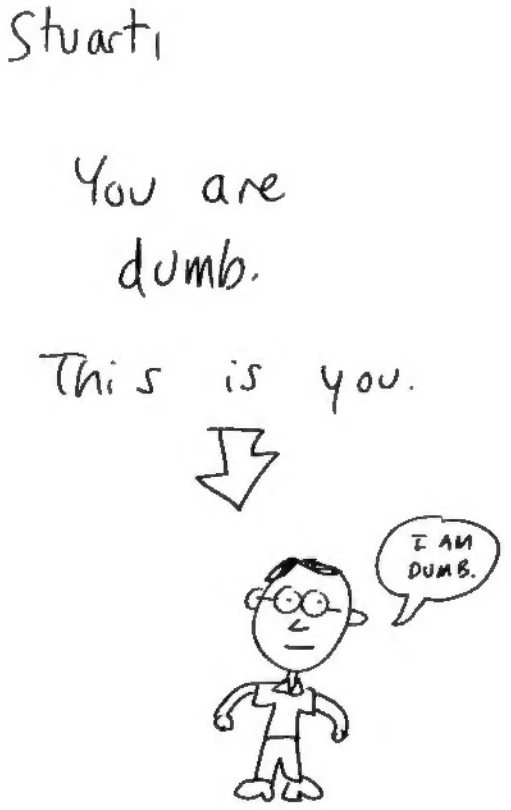
FOREWORD by Bill Jemas

Another day, another fight

It's March 21, 2002, 11:55 P.M. I'm awake mulling over an argument we had about this book. It simmered all day today and may boil over sometime tomorrow.

We all agree *Adventure* should include Marvel's best comic book artwork from the past two years with background stories about the inspirations and gyrations behind the books.

But I think *Adventure* should focus on the artwork, while Joe and Andrew Lis (*Adventure* editor) would emphasize the backstory. Joe and Andy even want to include photos of the editors. They would include lots of posed photos and behind-the-scenes stuff with Marvel employees, like this note from Axel Alonso (*Spider-Man* editor) to Stuart Moore (*Daredevil* editor).



This is not a new dispute: Joe and Jim McLauchlin, among others, have been banging away at me on this point since the first writing session.

Moreover, this type of argument has been going on, day and night, for two years. Bill against Joe and the comic guys. Bill and Joe against the comic guys. There has been a perpetual push and pull over whether each project should target the loyal "core" market of dedicated comic fans ("fanboys") or the broader audience of Marvel fans in the "mass market." We always make the same points, and Joe is always in the middle.

And here's what never happens: We never give up on each other and go our separate ways. Rather, we work out a plan and resolve our differences. We find a compromise between the mass market and the fanboy poles without compromising the essential inspiration for the work.

Basically, that is what this book is all about, because every major Marvel controversy has been about the core audience vs. mass market appeal—from dumping the Comics Code to pulping Elektra's panties. Moreover, every major Marvel leap forward has sprung from a strategic overlay of mass appeal on a core-fan foundation—from restoring collectibility to the market to launching the Ultimate Universe.

Brains and Smarts

And here's what happens next: Once we agree on a strategy, Joe puts his amazing intelligence to work, bringing the ideal creative team to the job with the perfect balance of editorial direction and creative freedom.

"Hey wait," you say, "Joe's not supposed to be brilliant. Building and inspiring a team, encouraging people to do their best work— that's not about brains, that's about heart." Well, that's another argument. Your heart has about as much to do with leadership as your liver does. Just as your brain runs your body, Joe's big brain runs Marvel's creative organization, and makes the comic community go.

Joe has the Brains, and I gots the Smarts—a knack for cooking up projects that work in both the mass and core markets. I don't have the

wild and pure ideas that spring from the minds of Mark Millar and Grant Morrison. What I do have is the ability to bridge the gap between areas of broad audience interest and comic book storytelling.

Enough about us, let's talk about you

And this industry needs a bridge—because left to its own devices, the comic community will isolate itself from the rest of the Earth. This industry is populated with incredibly intelligent people. And incredibly intelligent people often wind up isolated from the general population.

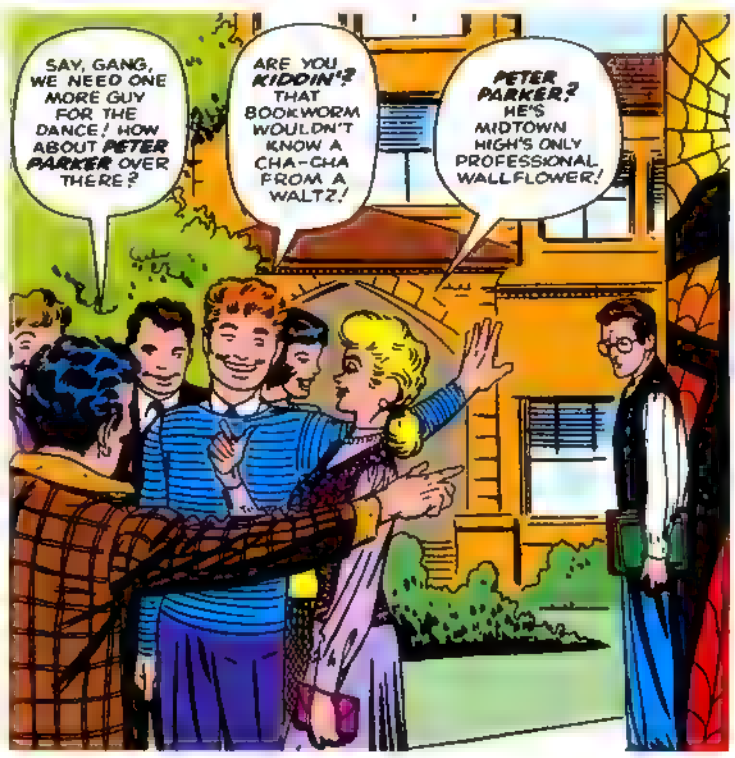
In high school, the best and brightest kids often focus on intellectual pursuits, ignoring their bodies and avoiding physical activities that would mix them with the student body. Not that the Advanced Placement kids are antisocial, just that their social groups tend to be insular (Chess Club, Computer Lab, etc.).

After graduation, many of those kids grow up to lead fairly reclusive work and social lives. The cruel/funny line is that the typical fanboy lives in the basement of his parents' house in Queens. Goodbye AV squad, hello local comic shop.

Jokes aside, what we're talking about is the tendency of very smart people to band together in elite, self-contained groups, removing themselves from the rest of society. From the perspective of the smart people, this can be a cozy arrangement. However, for the greater good, this is very bad. Our society needs our best minds to play a very active leadership role. In high school, we needed the smart kids to compile the yearbook and produce the school play. Our nation needs to hear the voices of our most intelligent citizens, not just the loudest.

Enough about you, let's talk about Marvel

This basic conflict within the intellectual community has played out in the pages of Marvel's comics for more than 40 years. In no place is this more evident than in Marvel's two most important comic franchises: the *X-Men* and *Spider-Man*. Peter Parker is a brilliant but alienated high school nerd who uses his spider-powers for selfish ends and pays the ultimate price. After failing to save his Uncle Ben, he will forever feel responsible, and spend his life serving his fellow man. In *X-Men*, Marvel's mutants divide into two rival families. On one side, Magneto's Brotherhood shuts themselves away in their own Avalon (read AV Room), from which they make either preemptive strikes or massive retaliatory attacks against humanity (read the football players and cheerleaders). On the other side, there are Professor Xavier's X-Men—"hated and feared by a humanity they are sworn to protect and serve" (read student council).


SAY, GANG, WE NEED ONE MORE GUY FOR THE DANCE! HOW ABOUT PETER PARKER OVER THERE?
ARE YOU KIDDIN'? THAT BOOKWORM WOULDN'T KNOW A CHA-CHA FROM A WALTZ!
PETER PARKER? HE'S MIDTOWN HIGH'S ONLY PROFESSIONAL WALLFLOWER!

The New Marvel is about being a "bully pulpit." And the pulpit is not for Joe and Bill, but for creative voices in the comic industry with something important they need to share with the world at large. There are thousands of New Marvel haters among our most loyal fans and longstanding contributors. They aren't bad guys any more than Magneto is. They just want the comics community to stay closed, and we just can't allow that to happen.

Origin and the Marvelous Adventure

Origin shows how all this plays out in a real-life project.

The Smarts: I wanted to "reveal" (i.e., make up) the origin of Wolverine because I knew it would be huge in both the comic and mass markets, and because I had a good answer for the deepest secret (i.e., not-yet-made-up story) in comics. What was Logan like as a child? The answer is easy—once you understand that Marvel Comics' most important target

audience is smart teenage kids with high disposable incomes who saw the *X-Men* movie and wanted to be like Wolvie. Obviously, Young Logan should be an affluent 12-year-old suburban kid.

The Brains: Joe had a big, bold vision for turning this marketing gimmick into an epic saga, and he assembled the dream team to do it. More important, he kept Paul Jenkins, Andy Kubert and Richard Isanove (plus me and himself) all working together to weave a wonderful tale of how this fairly ordinary young boy grew up to be one of the world's great and tragic heroes.

A very small and vocal minority of longtime comic fans expressed an incredibly hostile reaction to *Origin*, with some of the most shrill cries of protest—demands that Marvel stop the project dead in its tracks—coming from the people most likely to profit from the project. Those horrified screams came from a small and vocal minority of comic shop owners.

Your Friendly Neighborhood Retail-Man and Your Unfriendly Neighborhood Retail-Man

There are two kinds of retailers. First, there are the big, successful ones. They run clean, modern stores and actively promote the industry—visiting grammar schools, libraries and summer camps. These guys shout the praises of the comics genre from the highest mountains. No surprise, they loved *Origin*.

Listen to this: A typical monthly issue of *Wolverine* sells 80,000 copies, spread across 2,000 shops. *Origin* #1 sold 160,000 copies. Now, of those extra 80,000 copies of *Origin*, 75,000 were purchased by Marvel's top 1,000 accounts.

So most of the smallest 1,000 shops ordered no more of *Origin* than they did of the regular monthly *Wolverine.* Meet that other kind of retailer: He runs a modest, insular shop that is overtly hostile to new shoppers. This retailer has created his grown-up version of the AV Room. He knows his place of business is dirty, messy and confusing. That's the way he likes it, because the last thing this guy needs is a bunch of new kids barging in and giving him noogies and a wedgy.

Barbarians at the Gates

Marvel has taken heat for every new-reader initiative from *X-Force* to *Elektra—with* the loudest outcry reserved for *Ultimate Spider-Man*. Interestingly, none of the complaints about *USM* had anything to do with the books themselves. We heard this was a business initiative, not an artistic one—but Brian Michael Bendis, an unquestionably talented and uncompromising storyteller, was writing the book. We heard this new modern vision would rip apart the fabric of the Marvel Universe, but comic companies constantly publish new takes on old continuity. Everywhere from *Spider-Man: Chapter One* to *X-Men 2099*, these alternative universes are heaven on earth to fanboys. What we didn't hear was what was going on deep in the livers of the fanboys, that they did not want a bunch of new kids joining their Spider-Man Reader's Club. The self-appointed admissions committee didn't just say they were not going to buy *USM*; they demanded that Marvel not print it!

To support comic retailers, Marvel made the most important versions of *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Ultimate*

X-Men—the monthly comics—only available to them, and ran huge marketing programs to drive readers their way. We've handed out eight million samples to kids through shoe companies, toy stores and fast-food restaurants. We created a magazine-sized reprint for newsstands and invented dotComics to distribute electronic versions for free. All of this was intended to propel customers into comic shops to buy the real thing. Our top 1,000 accounts saw all of that as a friendly gesture, but all the bottom 1,000 saw was an impending invasion by hordes of strangers.

The Guardian

Paul Levitz runs DC Comics and is in a position to mobilize the massive AOL-TIME-PEOPLE-WARNER BOOKS AND MUSIC-TNT-TBS-CNN-HBO media machine to increase comic readership. With one click of the "send" button on his office e-mail, he could get an entire industry back on its feet. Yet this man, who has devoted his life to comics, chooses not to share the wonders of the genre with the world at large.

It appears that Levitz has purposely kept DC below the Time—then Time/Warner, now AOL Time/Warner—radar screen. Those who love him say it's because Levitz wants to shield his creators and characters from the commercial exploitation and corruption that could come from mass media exploitation. Those who loathe him say Levitz is a man with teeny talents, who keeps the industry tiny to protect his own power over truly bright and talented creators.

Here's no surprise: The Levitz lovers are the insiders and retailers who want to keep the comics club closed. The Levitz loathers are those who want to reach the next generation of new readers.

Good Cop, Bad Cop and the creative community

You cannot imagine how hard it is for creators to be truly imaginative and innovative within the context of the comic community. Every new idea is met with a cold blast of nasty from thousands of shop dwellers. Writers and artists are only human and often succumb to the shower of dirt bombs and feces that come flying at them whenever they explore a concept that might attract new recruits to this closed society. Old-line, hard-line fans scream in agony every time Marvel announces a new title or upgrades an old one.

Nothing like what happens elsewhere on Earth. Say you see a trailer for a new movie. You like it, you go see the movie; you don't, you won't. If the trailer is super-dumb, you might turn to the person sitting next to you and say, "Boy, that was super-dumb." But you would not think

of doing what fanboys do when they don't like a new comic. You wouldn't engage in an e-mailing, letter-writing, dung-chucking hate campaign against the director and demand that the studio burn the film.

For the most part, when Joe and I do our good-cop/bad-cop show we make ourselves lightning rods for the criticism. We are telling our creative community, "Go out and do what you do best—we've got your back." Ultimately, this is what Adventure is all about. It's not a "soapbox for Joe and Bill," it's about our ongoing efforts to turn Marvel into a megaphone for the writers and artists. And if that means the two of us make a little noise along the way, well, that's OK too. •

Sept.–Dec.

TREND: Marvel gets rid of 'color guides'

"Marvel was living in the print production Dark Ages," says Marvel President Bill Jemas. "With respect to comic coloring, we had the worst of all worlds. The "Marvel Way" was expensive—we paid hundreds of people hundreds of thousands of dollars to hand-color pages with pencils and markers. It was time-consuming, because these crayon-quality pages had to be turned over to a computer colorist who would replicate the process in Photoshop. And, with few exceptions, the end-product was really crappy because the money and time that could have been spent by and on one artist was split between two—we were perpetually a day late and a dollar short. For years, Marvel had been encouraging our hand-colorists to learn the new technology and encouraging our computer-coloring studios to hire artists, not technicians. In 2000, the time had come to make a swift and final change."

"When I arrived at Marvel with Marvel Knights, I was amazed to find that Marvel had barely grown in the technology department," said Quesada. "Here we were, handing them fully-colored finished discs and they had very little use for them. At that time MK was the only branch of Marvel doing any significant computer coloring in the modern-world sense." Marvel phased out hand-colored guides in late 2000 and moved to a 100% computer-based system.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Mark Millar

Landing the Scottish-born scribe who had made headlines and thrilled readers with over-the-top mega-storylines on WildStorm Productions' *The Authority* was a major coup for Marvel. His "widescreen" take on *Ultimate X-Men* picked up right where he left off, with maniacal villains, edgy heroes, and world-threatening cataclysms.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Ultimate Spidey

They said it couldn't be done. But it was done.

The new "Ultimate" Spider-Man led the charge and carried the banner for Marvel's Ultimate line of books, that were rooted in traditional Marvel mythos, but relaunched in a contemporary setting. The new Peter Parker wasn't a Daily Bugle photographer anymore—he worked on the Bugle website. He didn't fiddle with test tubes—he used an iMac. And he sure as hell didn't wear sweater vests.

Ultimate Spider-Man took comic readers by storm with a younger, hipper take on the wall-crawler that many didn't expect to stick. But it did. However, the more things change. With the death of his Uncle Ben, the new *Ultimate Spider-Man* learned once again that with great power, there must also come great responsibility.

BY THE NUMBERS:

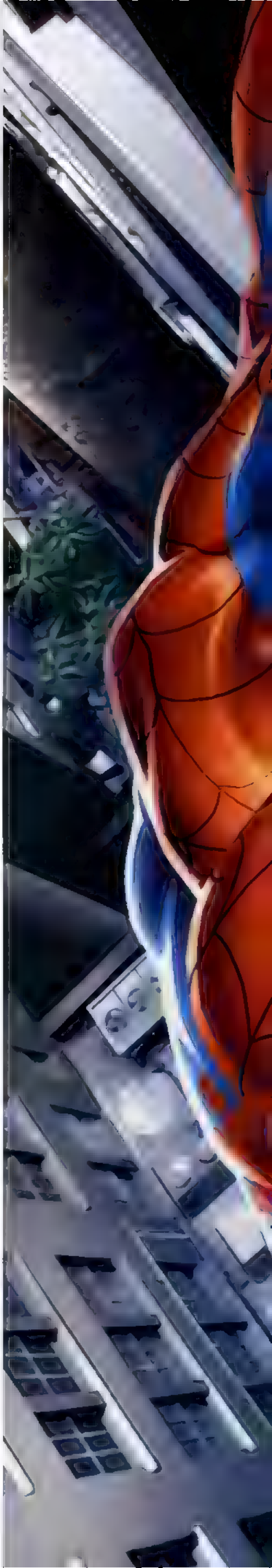
10,000 Number of copies of *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 reordered within 48 hours of its release

26 Cover price reduction in cents on selected Marvel "Slashback" titles announced in October 2000

10 Extra minutes of bonus footage on the *X-Men* movie DVD released November 21, 2000

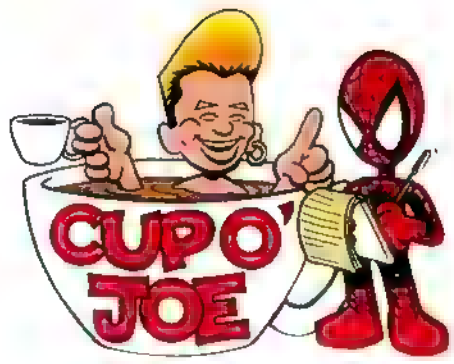
42,500 Approximate number of copies of *Spidey: A Universe X Special* Marvel had to shred in December after a veiled insult toward a former employee was found in the issue

16 The number of Marvel Comics in Diamond Comics Distribution's top 20 best-selling comic books for December 2000.



THE NEW CHIEF

Quesada moves into the New Marvel



On August 30, 2000, Joe Quesada moved from being a Knight to a King. Quesada, who founded the highly successful "Marvel Knights" imprint, was installed as the new editor in chief of Marvel Comics by President Bill Jemas...much to Quesada's own surprise.

"Two or three weeks before the announcement," Quesada remembers, "Bill took me to lunch. We were supposed to discuss a new title concept I had, but he told me, 'I don't want to discuss the concept. I just want to ask if you want to be Editor in Chief.'"

"There had been only one success in recent Marvel memory, and that was Marvel Knights," Jemas remembers. "Joe proved himself at a time when many people were giving up. Joe and Nanci took characters like Daredevil and Punisher, who had lost most of their relevance and nearly all of their sales, and turned them into top 10 books. As a group, Marvel editors had kept the faith, but lost their way. Sure, we could have found somebody else with a creative vision for the books, because visions are a dime a dozen. Joe was the only candidate with the right combination of creativity and know-how. We needed a fix-it man, and that was Joe."

Quesada accepted the assignment and took the reins on August 30 with a lot of enthusiasm—and a little bit of well-warranted fear. "I call this job the 'eek.' EIC," he said at the time. "That's how it sounds. And that's what I find myself saying on a daily basis. 'Eek!'"

Art by Chris Giarusso (above) and Joe Quesada (left)

FORWARD, HO!

Quesada's first official act

Joe Quesada took over as Marvel's Editor in Chief on August 30, 2000. By the Tuesday after Labor Day, a mere six days later, he circulated this memo to the entire editorial staff as a reminder of things to think about at an upcoming editorial meeting:

MARVEL ENTERPRISES, INC.
387 Park Ave South, New York, NY 10016

September 5, 2000

Pep talk time! Editorial summit at my house on Friday, September 15.

Trade paperbacks!

Coloring!

Read-out system. Let's talk about how to improve it. Maybe go to 2 read-out editors?

Solicitations—How can we make them less revealing? Let's get a general consensus of what will work. Should we do an event here and there and *not* advertise it so that we have the element of surprise?

Things I want to be informed of:
Covers
Creative changes
Costume changes and designs
New projects before they go in for profit-and-loss approval

Beside Bobbie's two guys, Sal and Carlos, does anyone have contract guys who are not getting their comp bundles?

Assistant editors need to help us with ideas. You guys are our target audience!

Let's talk licensed properties. Assistants, help! Give us some ideas of what might be out there that we can snag.

Letters pages. Let's start to make them fun again! Assistants? Why don't assistants get credit on the credits page?

Where can I find a master list of editors' books? What's the difference between Assistant, Associate, Editor and Senior?

Fever subsiding,
JQ

THE 'ULTIMATE' GAMBLE

Back to basics pays off

The first shots fired in the 1960s Marvel revolution were also the first shots fired at the New Marvel in 2000.

Ultimate Marvel was new Marvel President Bill Jemas's "ground zero" approach to Marvel heroes. Old characters were relaunched, free of the bonds of continuity, in a contemporary setting, in the new Ultimate universe. Marvel Senior Vice-President Russ Brown had dozens of licensees and sponsors lined up to support the book, while Marvel's PR firm, Bender Helper Impact, placed hundreds of Ultimate articles from the *Wall Street Journal* to *Entertainment Weekly.*

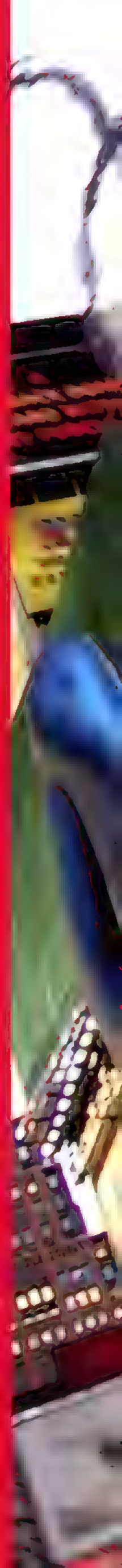
The only problem? Many Marvel insiders were secretly wishing for the Ultimate flop, hoping Jemas, writer Brian Michael Bendis and company would fall flat on their faces.

"*Ultimate Spider-Man* was the experiment that wasn't supposed to work," says Joe Quesada, the man who introduced Jemas to Bendis. "Or better yet, the experiment that the old-timers and hard-liners didn't want to work!" Joe remembers, "At the time, I was not EIC, just one of the rank and file and privy to all of the negative buzz and spin. Bill's outline didn't have Spider-Man appearing in costume until—what?—issue #3 or #4?! In increasingly loud whispers, Marvel executives predicted it would be as a huge mistake that would fail miserably. I had never seen a project start at Marvel with so much fanfare on the outside, where internally, so many people wanted it to fail."

Quesada believes the negativity sprang from old myths. "Everybody here thought *they* knew better because they had been doing comics for years, and *they* were listening to the 20,000 hardcore fanboys who wanted their comics a certain way."

That certain way turned out to be...the Ultimate way. By tapping Brian Michael Bendis as writer, and going to the well and bringing back former *Spider-Man* artist Mark Bagley, Jemas and Marvel made *Ultimate Spider-Man* a monster success. In September 2000, *Ultimate Spider-Man* debuted as Marvel's 13th best-selling book. A year later, it had *doubled* its sales and anchored an entire Ultimate Marvel line of books.

"There was a lot of licking of chops," Jemas remembers. "But we knew how to make this work. And it worked beautifully."



Art by Mark Bagley (above) and Joe Quesada (right)

Art by Alex Ross

NEW BLOOD

Marvel taps new editors

In September, the House of Ideas looked more like the House of New Faces. On September 21, Marvel brought in two high-powered editors: Axel Alonso and Stuart Moore.

"They represented elite, literary comic work," President Bill Jemas says. "While Joe knows comics, Joe also knows everyone in the comics industry. I had been picking his brain, and rolodex, from my first day on the job. The conversations always went the same way: I'd show up in Joe's office, hat in hand. He'd be thrilled to see me (because he was thrilled to have any legitimate reason to take a break from penciling). I'd tell him what Marvel needed, and he would tell me who he thought could get the job done. And then I'd bum a stack of comics off of him—20 samples from 20 different creators. Then the next morning I'd show up again, dump 19 of the 20 books on his desk, and say those books all suck, but this one is great."

Bill continued, "Then came Axel. I left Joe's office with 20 different Axel books and came back the next morning, having read 20 great comics, and handed Joe a signed job requisition for a senior editor. The interviews with Axel were really funny. He kept thinking of things he wanted to do at Marvel, I kept saying yes, and he kept looking at Joe and asking, "Is this guy for real?"

Joe offers, "I knew from very early on that Axel was someone I wanted at the New Marvel in my stable of editors. I'm a pretty competitive guy and the only guy I felt competitive with was Axel when he was at AOL Comics. All I could think was, Imagine if this guy had free reign to do his thing!"

"Stuart's senior editorial position at AOL Comics had been gutted, so he left to pursue a freelance editorial and writing career," recalls Joe. "But he still had the fire in his heart. And I remember back in my comics reading days that Stuart was one of the editors whose name I looked for on books. It was an assurance of quality! Together Axel and Stuart brought us a voice that hadn't been heard at Marvel in a very long time. It would give us some of the editorial backbone we'd lost."

Stuart Moore took over new Editor in Chief Joe Quesada's old position as head of the Marvel Knights imprint, while Axel Alonso quickly jumped into the *Spider-Man* books, among others. For the next year and beyond, both would help to revolutionize Marvel.

ALL IN COLOR FOR A DOLLAR

Fantastic Four gets bargain basement writer

Newly anointed Editor in Chief Joe Quesada proved that a promise made is a promise kept at the New Marvel. Quesada sent new *Fantastic Four* scripter Jeph Loeb a check for $1 as payment for scripting the book. Loeb had previously stated in *Wizard* magazine that he wanted to write *Fantastic Four* so badly, he'd do it for $1. Loeb was elated.

"I'm buying all the outstanding shares of Marvel stock, making sure Joe Quesada keeps his job," Loeb said on October 4, 2000.

That day, Marvel stock closed at 3 3/16.

Art by Carlos Pacheco and Jesus Merino

X-MEN: THE HIDDEN BYRNE

And the reunion that almost was...

John Byrne is not one to go quietly into that good night. When Marvel pulled the plug on *X-Men: The Hidden Years*, Byrne, a well-known creator who has worked on-again, off-again with Marvel for over 20 years, stood up to be counted. He argued that *Hidden Years* was profitable. He argued that *Hidden Years* was a stand-alone book that anyone could follow. He argued that *Hidden Years* had a loyal following. Right on all counts.

Byrne also took Joe Quesada directly to task, comparing the editor in chief with the chief executive. "If I can go all Republican for a moment, in Quesada we have the comic-industry equivalent of Bill Clinton," Byrne wrote. "Everyone kept saying Clinton would 'grow into the office.' As his last days so clearly demonstrate, this never happened. He remained a small-time politico who never escaped his bumpkin background. Likewise, Quesada is now editor in chief of Marvel Comics. Yet he continues to act like the small-press publisher he 'used' to be."

The comments didn't do anything to endear either party to the other. And unfortunately, the feud scotched another project entirely—a planned reunion between legendary *X-Men* collaborators Chris Claremont and John Byrne.

"We actually had Claremont and Byrne back on *X-Men*...for a couple of weeks," Quesada says. "We had this concept that [Editor] Tom Brevoort came up with called 'The End,' a series of books that were a possible final story for any given characters."

Claremont and Byrne, who parted years earlier under less-than-perfect circumstances, were set to kick off the series with *X-Men: The End*.

"Of course, I was told that they would never, ever work together again," Quesada says. "So I talked to Chris about it and Chris had no problem. I talked to John Byrne about it, and Byrne said he would only be involved if he could plot it, draw it, and then never see it again. If Chris wanted to dialogue it, fine. John would just take his check and go home. John said, 'Now you'll never get Chris to agree to *that*.'"

Claremont agreed immediately, but then *Hidden Years* was canceled and Byrne loudly left Marvel. "His thing was that if we didn't do *Hidden Years*, he didn't want to work with Marvel at all," Quesada says. "That basically killed the project."

Marvel finally starts "The End" with *Hulk: The End* in 2002, reuniting the acclaimed *Incredible Hulk* creative team of Peter David and Dale Keown.

"What I find entertaining to this day," says Quesada with glee, "is that almost two years have gone by and I hear from fans that John Byrne still constantly brings up, complains about and gets heated over *Hidden Years*. It warms the cockles of my heart to know that this 'small press publisher' is a constant point of soreness and aggravation to that man."

Art by Joe Quesada

X-COMMUNICATED

X-Men *books get slashed*

The unthinkable happened. Marvel threw away easy money. It had long been an industry in-joke that Marvel could put an "X" on the cover of *anything* and it'd sell. In November, they chose to do just the opposite, canceling six X-books. "The books were just incredibly insular," Joe Quesada says. "They were books for the 50-year-old fan." In all, *Bishop: The Last X-Man*, *Gambit*, *Generation X*, *Mutant X*, *X-Man* and *X-Men: The Hidden Years* all went the way of the dinosaur.

"Once a month, I come up with a one-liner that really gets to Joe," laughs Marvel President Bill Jemas. "This time, I called the X-books 'comics about comics.' In order to understand the *X-Men* you had to have already read 100 previous books—and to understand those 100, you would have had to read 100 before that; the books were way too *dense*.

"But a 'comic about a comic' is worse than just dense, it's a book that has strayed far away from what Marvel does best. Marvel peaks when our characters look and feel like real world people facing realistic issues similar to (or at least analogous to) what our readers face in their own lives. Peter Parker finding the money to pay his rent and help out Aunt May. X-Men dealing with anti-mutant prejudice that mirrors racial bigotry. That's what we do, and, to borrow a phrase, we are the best there is at what we do. The *X-Men* books started to fail when the characters were interacting more heavily with their own back story than with stories pulled off of the front page of the *New York Times*."

And so a good chunk of the X-Universe died not with a bang, but with a whimper.

Art by Tom Raney (left), Carlos Pacheco and Jesus Merino (right)

THE ULTIMATE MUTANT

Not Wolverine. Not Cylcops. Mark Millar.

By December 2000, *Ultimate Spider-Man* was cruising along and making huge waves. The first three issues sold to the bare walls almost immediately, and the series was playing to rave reviews. Writer Brian Michael Bendis was set to reprise his success with *Ultimate X-Men*, Marvel's second Ultimate launch.

"Then Bendis decided he couldn't do *Ultimate X-Men*," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada remembers. "I think he just realized that we weren't going to get the same results out of him on this particular book. He was very friendly, truly professional, and honest. But the bottom line was, we had to find a new guy."

And that's when Mark Millar came in.

The fit was not an obvious one. "I kept saying, when I showed Millar's *Authority* stuff to Marvel President Bill Jemas, 'Don't judge this guy on the content, judge him on the story,'" Quesada remembers. "At this point, I mean, I barely knew Bill, so I wasn't sure if he was going to look at this and go, 'What? You show me a book like *this*?'"

"I have an entirely different recollection," says Bill, "Way back when the negative buzz started on *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Joe had forwarded to me a hilarious e-mail from some wacky writer who was simultaneously trashing the idea and saying it deserves 100% support from the creative community. When Brian dropped out, I asked Joe if we should contact that guy who wrote the funny e-mail. Maybe Joe thought I'd think Mark was a crazy choice because *Authority* was so extreme, but hell, we hired Brian because we liked his work on *Torso*—the serial killer story."

"Bill's mistaken. He takes the credit for everything and he usually gets away with it because I have a bad memory, but this one I remember clearly!" says Quesada with a chuckle. "I did forward him Millar's wacky e-mails, it was great reading. He never asked for him, however. I just happened to one day give him the issue of *Authority* that had the team doing all sorts of nasty things to another super team that vaguely resembled the Avengers and that was that!"

The combination of the edgy writer and the always-evergreen X worked wonders. *Ultimate X-Men* debuted as the industry's best-selling book for December, according to Diamond Comics Distribution, and remains one of comics' best sellers to this day.

Art by Salvador Larroca (left) and Joe Quesada (right)

Art by Todd McFarlane

THE GREAT DEBATE

Quesada puts his money where his mouth is

By late December, Marvel's newly anointed Editor in Chief Joe Quesada was feeling his oats. So why not stir things up? Joe sent this letter to *Wizard: The Comics Magazine*, which ran in the December 2000 issue:

> *The first weeks as Marvel's EIC have been pretty interesting. But despite the never-ending waves of groupies and hangers-on pounding at my door, I still ponder one question: whatever happened to Todd McFarlane?*
>
> *What happened to the golden boy who reveled in his badass-ness and made his fortune on the backs of fans, retailers and collectors only to disappear in our industry's greatest time of need? Does he no longer care? Or is he just afraid to come back?*
>
> *Where is The Todd and his big, yapping mouth? I'll tell you where: home, wrapped in his MTV Music Awards and* Spawn *movie posters saying, 'Please, Wanda, don't make me go back to comics! Everyone will see I really had no clothes!'*
>
> *Back in the good ol' days, Todd never had trouble calling anyone to the mat. So if he can dish it out, I'm going to assume he can take it. I'm prepared to offer Todd McFarlane $1,000 to come back to the comic industry and draw! That's right: $1,000 cash, and...*
>
> *...I'll go head-to-head with you, pencil to pencil. You do an issue, I'll do an issue, and we'll let the fans, retailers and collectors you abandoned decide which book is better.*
>
> *Come on, Toddler, whaddya say? Wait! Does anyone hear that? BUC-BUC-BUC-BUCKAW! Sounds like big Mac's in the house!*
>
> *—Joe Quesada*

McFarlane, Marvel's former *Amazing Spider-Man* artist who went on to fame and fortune as the creator of *Spawn*, replied via his website:

> *Mr. Q. is a tad bit confused as to what makes me tick. One of the bigger reasons for leaving Marvel in 1991 was to have the freedom to do the things that I wanted to do. I long ago stopped worrying about what some Marvel employee wanted me to do with my day. And so Joe's challenge is going to fall on my deaf ears, just like every other thing that a competitor would like to see me do different. I'll do what I deem important after talking it over with my company and fans.*

Quesada quickly replied: "All right, all right Toddster, I'll tell you what: I'll make it $1,100! You called my bluff, chief! Come on, Toddy boy, don't go spineless on me now. The fans are calling you out, go ahead ask them—everyone wants to see you with pencil in hand. You know it's killin' ya—if it weren't, I wouldn't be here writing a rebuttal!"

The debate went on in different forums for months. "I was thinking, 'Doesn't anyone remember how much fun this industry used to be?'" Quesada laughs today. "That's one of the reasons why I started this—because we're trying to get people into that fun state of mind again. It's *just* comic books. It didn't matter to me how big a jackass I appeared to be, as long as people were talking comics!"

January

TREND: Promoting #2's

Everybody pushes the new stuff when it's brand-spankin' new. In January, Marvel rolled out a marketing idea beautiful in its simplicity—promoting its best stuff every month, even if it isn't a #1 issue.

"In comics, we have this great myth that #2s are going to plummet in sales," Marvel President Bill Jemas said. "Why? Because we don't advertise them. *Ultimate X-Men* #2 was still the biggest thing we had going for the month, and yes, it was a #2. So we pushed it hard."

Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada saw Jemas as taking a cue from his old job at the NBA. "Bill came from the real marketing world, which surpassed the comic marketing world years ago," he said. "He realizes that you advertise Michael Jordan every month."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: John Romita Jr.

The longtime Marvel artist and legacy—he's the son of Marvel legend John Romita Sr.—played on a big stage in January. In addition to his usual duties on *Amazing Spider-Man*, Romita picked up the artistic reins on *Incredible Hulk* with January's issue #24. Long known for imagery with impact, Romita drew a huge, powerful Hulk, full of rage and rough around the edges, that grabbed readers' attention with brute savagery and emotional punch. *Incredible Hulk* suddenly became both a buzz book that got the industry talking and a fan-favorite read.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: The Hulk

Ol' Greenskin pulled double-duty for the month. A new spotlight was shined on him with the addition of artist John Romita Jr. in his main book, and the Vertigo duo of Garth Ennis and John McCrea handling a *Hulk Smash* limited series. Fortunately, Ol' Jade Jaws has broad shoulders, and Hulk carried both books to top-50 sales finishes in the industry. And did we mention the Hulk also starred in *Defenders* #1? The not-so-jolly green giant was seemingly everywhere in January

BY THE NUMBERS:

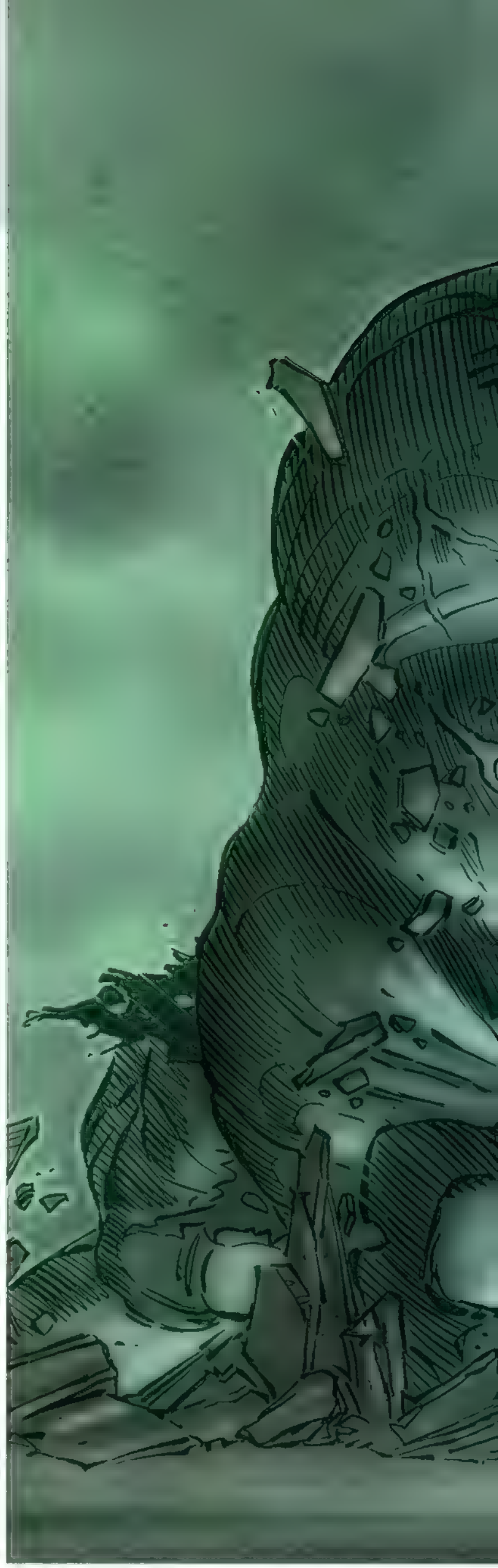
31 Marvel Comics published this month

6 Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"

5 Months in a row sales increased on *Ultimate Spider-Man* by January 2001, not bad for a title on issue #5

24 Number of candy bars per box in True Confections's "The Amazing Spider-Man Chocolate Bars" released in January

2 Number of days it took Marvel to sell completely out of *Uncanny X-Men* #390, the issue featuring the death of Colossus



Art by John Romita Jr. and Tom Palmer

HULK SMASH!

Garth Ennis gets mean and green

The Marvel talent pool grew with the addition of Irish tag-team of writer Garth Ennis and artist John McCrea. Ennis was noted for pushing the envelope on the award-winning *Preacher* from Vertigo/AOL Comics, and he brought a taste of the ol' ultra-violence to Marvel's most violent mainstay...largely because, well, he needed it.

"We had been talking about why *Hulk* didn't matter for quite some time," Marvel President Bill Jemas recalls. "And the reason why was that there was a flaw in the way the book had developed. Suddenly, there wasn't a Hulk anymore. There were Hulks—different color Hulks and smart Hulks and dumb Hulks and all kinds of Hulks. We had gotten away from what Hulk does best—and that's smash.

"*Hulk Smash* was executed as well as it could have been. It was 'Hulk Smash!,' and that's all it was. The book had to be about breaking loose the monster—pure and simple Hulk to get us back on track."

Art by Kevin Nowlan (left) and John McCrea (above)

ANGRY, BUT PEPPY

Quesada unloads on the staff

Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada missed a few days in January with illness, and got a chance to fire off what he calls this "angry pep letter."

MARVEL ENTERPRISES, INC.
387 Park Ave South, New York, NY 10016

Hey, folks!

I just spent the better part of three feverish days reading over a very large stack of black-and-white review copies that I just didn't have the time to get to over the course of the past few weeks with all the freelancer guests we had. Although I see a tremendous amount of improvement in what we're doing, we still have a long way to go.

Overall, we're doing some very good things, but for the sake of this letter I'm going to be a real bastard and focus primarily on what in my mind needs immediate addressing. And I mean immediately!

You still need a road map, atlas and Farmer's Almanac to understand some of our books. The stories are still too insular and self-referential. I know that there will come a time when we will find it utterly embarrassing to make references to WW II, but it just isn't happening fast enough for my tastes. Come on, folks, let's get in the game! With the exception of *Captain America*, this needs to stop. We have a slew of disenfranchised youths looking for an alternative and edgy nipple to grab hold of and we're still sitting here milking our aging fanboys and continuously kissing our own asses for 40 years of wonderful but OLD stories!

Back when Stan and company rocked the world, a lot of people found themselves stylistically and creatively behind the times. Those that didn't change got out of the business or hibernated at DC, making Marvel's success a sure thing. This is that time again. If someone wants to be a dinosaur, then you're in the wrong place. As of today, my office is a virtual La Brea Tar Pit for antiquated ideas.

Another concern is how many characters this month I've seen come back from the dead. We've gotten to the point where we're mocking ourselves in our own books. In *Thunderbolts*, Charcoal said, with respect to a character who was back from the dead, "I can't wait until I die." Now granted, it's a funny line. But if we can't take it seriously, how can the fans? We need to meet and discuss what we're doing with respect to this. If characters are going to die, they should stay dead. If we want to play with bringing them back from the dead, then let's not play with killing them at all. Now I'm not against killing characters. But we treat death with such little respect in the Marvel Universe that our readers never take it seriously and it loses all finality.

I admit I'm picking on the negative because I want to impress upon all of you the need for haste in fixing these problems. We have at this point the best editorial corps in the business and we react quicker to adversity than any group I've ever seen. That being said, I challenge you to challenge our creators and yourselves. If new readers are going to come in, the time is now! If we're going to hook them, the time is now! We are at the crossroads! We can either write and draw stories that will make us all feel the warm glow of our youthful nostalgia, or we can reach beyond that and create stories that excite us, challenge us and, dare I say it, maybe even make us a little bit nervous!

I want our writers and pencilers to come up with new concepts, new stories, new characters. Tell them to stop looking backwards. Forget page after page of flashback. Forget those gosh darn footnotes. If the villain is a bad dude, I don't need ten pages of his villainous history to realize how bad he or she is. Just have 'em kill a puppy or something and move on.

This is urgent, folks! Start looking at all of your proposals, all your plots, and review them carefully. Fresh new eyes may be upon us and we're going into the Trade Paperback biz full steam ahead. So challenge yourselves, challenge your creators and challenge me, and let's start kicking tail now!

Fever subsiding,
JQ

MAKE MILLAR'S MARVEL!

Coveted scribe takes exclusive plunge

Scottish writer Mark Millar took comics to new heights—or new lows, depending on how you choose to look at it—with over-the-top violence and shocking storylines on WildStorm Productions' *The Authority*. Millar became one of comics' hottest commodities, and was wooed by multiple publishers during a December 2000 trip to the U.S. Millar made an exclusive choice in January...

"This is just a quick one to clarify some rumors kicking around regarding my move to the States this year. There's been a lot of Internet speculation lately and, after a batch of British newspaper profiles over the weekend, I thought it was best to come clean and let everyone know what I'm up to.

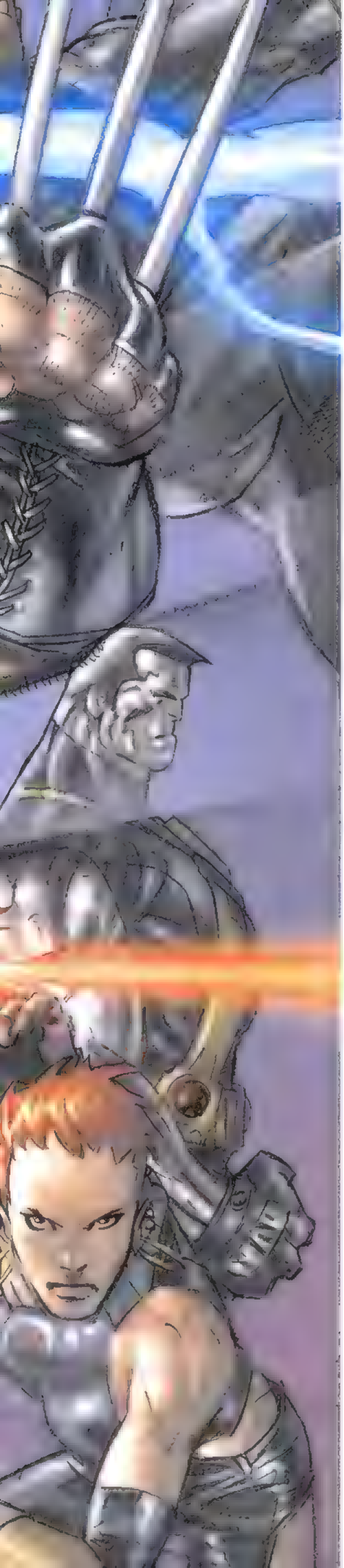
"As has been reported, I was made a couple of truly fine offers from WildStorm and Marvel before Christmas. The WildStorm gig was an exclusive contract where I'd up sticks and move from Glasgow to sunny California and work, in-house, as Head Writer and Brainstormer-in-Chief from WildStorm's offices in La Jolla. The WildStorm guys are old mates of mine and this was incredibly tempting, especially since it hasn't stopped raining here in Scotland since something like 1974.

"However, what Joe Quesada and Bill Jemas at Marvel offered was a chance for me to put my money where my mouth is, working on the front lines and playing my part in Marvel's major play for new readers in 2001. In case you haven't noticed, the buzz up at Park Avenue South has been electric these last few months and I just want to play a bigger part in it. My decision was as simple as that. Joe Q has turned the place around a hundred and eighty degrees and Marvel's gone from being the ugly girl on the dance-floor to the girl everyone most wants to shag. It's not about money. You can make ten times as much money in TV. It's about respect for the creators, a level of enthusiasm that's been missing from comics these last few years and a mapped-out mission from Bill and Joe to SAVE this brilliant little industry we're all so besotted with.

"As you can tell, I'm excited. I haven't felt this good about comics since 1986 and I honestly reckon that 2001 is going to be even better. The enthusiasm's infectious."

Art by Bryan Hitch and Andrew Currie

Art by Adam Kubert and Richard Isanove



THE ERA OF GOOD FEELINGS

Marvel sales starting to dominate

The comic book market being what it is, books are ordered three months in advance. The changes Marvel started making in September really wouldn't affect sales until January. Well, when January's numbers came in, the effect was profound.

The top six best-sellers of the month, as reported by Diamond Comics Distribution, were all Marvel books—*X-Men* #110, *Uncanny X-Men* #390, *Ultimate X-Men* #2, *Wolverine* #160, *Avengers* #38 and *Punisher* #12. In fact, Marvel even had 10 of the top 11 sellers for the month.

"Overall and corporately, Marvel had a lot of broken pieces when I came in," Marvel President Bill Jemas says. "And as tough as the situation was in editorial, it wasn't the most broken piece of the company. But the editorial guys clearly needed leadership. They needed somebody that could run them. They needed Joe Quesada, and when they got him, things turned around as quickly as they could."

Art by Alan Davis

BAD GIRLS FOR FANBOYS

The remark that pissed off a thousand geeks

Marvel President Bill Jemas ruffled some feathers—God only knows why—with some remarks in the comic distribution trade publication *Diamond Dialogue*. Jemas used Diamond's "Year in Review" to preview some Marvel plans for 2001.

"In 2001, Marvel will reverse a five-year decline in readership and reestablish ourselves as an important mainstream publisher, as America's Storyteller. We will not do this by repeating our past practices and hoping for the best, but by segmenting and diversifying our line.

"For 10 years, comics fans have complained that Marvel cranks out too many similar titles, that they can't afford to buy them all, and that they can't follow their complexity. Thousands voted with their feet and walked away from the hobby. We'll face this issue head-on by canceling redundant titles and reaching out to new readers with more diverse products.

"We will launch new titles in two hot direct market categories that we are currently missing: 1) Bad Girls for Fanboys. Marvel has some of the best female characters in the business, and will launch titles starring strong, sexy women. 2) Mature Readers. Under a new imprint, Marvel will publish adult-oriented, non-Code books."

"Bad Girls for Fanboys" got under the skin of, well, the Fanboys. How could Jemas disrespect them so? How could he disrespect comics so?

People again voted with their feet, and the feet flocked to see the "Bad Girls." When *Elektra* #1 debuted in July 2001, it hit the charts as a top-10 selling book for the month.

Art by Frank Quitely

Art by J. G. Jones

February

TREND: Getting rid of the 'Group Grope'

By February, Marvel made a change in its cover policy. "Marvel President Bill Jemas asked me to line up what I thought were the most effective covers I ever drew," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada remembers. "Then he asked me to figure out what they all had in common."

The commonality? Single, dominant, dynamic images. "The toughest thing to make work on any sort of magazine cover is a group shot," Quesada says today. "And yet traditionally, comics loved group shots. Our new philosophy basically became, 'Keep the cover *simple*.'"

The change was made, gradually—not that it sat well with Quesada, who had been drawing comics for 10 years. "Now, I hate the 'group grope' cover," he says. "But I was resistant at first. It was one of those things where you had to hang me out the window and shake me a little bit till all the comic geek flaked off. Although I intrinsically knew that single images made the best covers, and even though I employed the technique more often than not, I still had comic book disease festering somewhere in my body. That cancer that says things are done in this business because they've always been done that way without ever asking why."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Brian Michael Bendis

By February, it had become apparent that Ultimate Marvel was a runaway train, and writer Brian Michael Bendis was the engineer. Sales on February's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #6 were up 20% over #1 levels and still growing, and Bendis launched a new *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* book. His popularity with fans was growing faster than anyone imagined. Anyone, that is, except Joe Quesada.

"I gave him the speech," Quesada remembers. "I said, 'Okay, you get fan mail now. But once you're exposed to a Marvel audience, what a difference it will be. You'll start getting letters from fans saying, 'Who are you? Have you done comics before?'

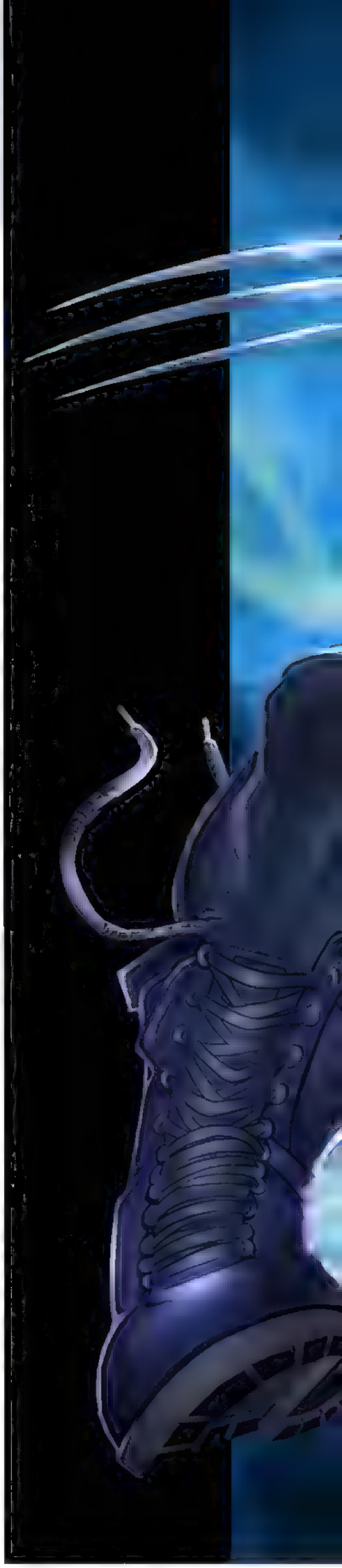
"Bendis was like, 'Oh, yeah. Oh, sure.' But it happened. He got five times the volume of mail *post-Ultimate* than he did before. How did I know this would happen? Because after being a high-profile industry pro for 7 years, when I came back to relaunch *Daredevil* with Kevin Smith, I got letters saying, 'Who are you and where did you come from?' What an eye-opening experience."

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Ultimate Wolverine

He was barely glimpsed in *Ultimate X-Men* #1, appearing only in the last panel. But the slow burn turned into a wildfire by February, as Wolverine was playing front and center in *Ultimate X-Men* and branching out elsewhere. When Wolvie co-starred with Spider-Man for the debut of *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up*, fans flocked to the new showcase and cash registers rang. *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* #1 chimed in as the 4th best-selling book for the month, riding the broad shoulders of the short, furry Canadian mutant.

BY THE NUMBERS:

40	Marvel Comics published this month
7	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
40	Number of Marvel Comics this month that ranked in Diamond Comics Distributions' "Top 100" sellers
9,625	Sales increase, in copies sold, from *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 to February's *Ultimate Spider-Man* #6
3	Number of lines Joe Quesada had as an actor in Kevin Smith's *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* movie, which was filming in February



Art by Salvador Larroca

MEETING OF THE ULTIMATES

Timing is everything

February's debut of *Ultimate Team-Up* allowed Ultimate Universe characters to meet and interact, in stories written by *Ultimate Spider-Man* writer Brian Michael Bendis.

There is an interesting behind-the-scenes story here. Brian (living in Cleveland at the time) had written this Spidey-Wolverine story way back in September and handed it to Matt Wagner, who did a beautiful job on the art. Meanwhile, Mark Millar (living in Scotland) was writing Wolverine into *Ultimate X-Men*. However, in this tiny three-book universe there was no coordination.

"We got very lucky," Marvel President Bill Jemas laughs. "Wolverine just *happened* to be exactly where he needed to be in the pages of *Ultimate X-Men* to make sense in *Ultimate Team-Up* #1. It worked out, but it was by accident." Jemas adds, "Mark happened to have Wolverine on his way to New York, which is where *Team-Up* #1 started."

"That's when I know we had to get everybody together in New York for an *Ultimate* planning session," added Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. Out of that summit meeting, which would take place in December 2000, came the spring-boards for two mega Marvel projects—*The Ultimates* and *The Truth*.

Art by Phil Hester (right) and Matt Wagner (left)

HULK SMASH PUNY SALES!

Ol' Greenskin bounds up the charts

Incredible Hulk was a title on the move in February. Powerful, bone-jarring art by John Romita Jr. (the Hulk actually punched the Abomination's eye out of his head in #25!) and gut-wrenching stories of betrayal and revenge by Paul Jenkins were making the book a hot commodity. *Incredible Hulk* #25 jumped five slots up the sales charts in February, marking the fourth straight month it made positive progress in sales.

"The recognition meant a lot to me," says writer Paul Jenkins. "There was a feeling of 'When was the last time *Hulk* really mattered?' This was a storied Marvel character. It was great to know you could make people pay attention to the character again with a good story."

The lesson, says Quesada, "Paul showed us all that with a little TLC, you could take any character and breathe new life into it on both a critical and commercial level. And all of this acclaim came via word of mouth!"

Art by John Romita Jr.

FRUNK!

March

TREND: Turning Editors Loose

March brought the announcements that Editor Axel Alonso would soon be taking over *Incredible Hulk*, and that *Captain America* would be moving to Marvel Knights under the stewardship of Editor Stuart Moore. More and more, Marvel was looking for new voices on older characters in an effort to stir things up.

"The difference between New Marvel and Old Marvel is that when we find a talent, we put him on stage," says Marvel President Bill Jemas. "Axel Alonso? He's on the *Spider-Man* books and *Incredible Hulk*. And *Captain America* was our first very big overture to Stuart Moore. We let him settle in for a while, but we really turned him loose right about here," says Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada.

"When I was running Marvel Knights, I had *Daredevil* to launch and define my tenure. Stuart had yet to have a book that would be his signature title. Since he came on board, for the most part, he had to take existing projects and concentrate on making them better. He had a chance to create some projects from ground zero, but he had yet to be given an icon. When we decided to move *Cap*, I knew Stuart was the man!"

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Tom Brevoort

Marvel and its main competition, AOL Comics, had agreed to play nice-nice on several occasions in the companies' history. But the long-awaited *JLA/Avengers* crossover, combining the mightiest super-teams and *all* the major characters from each publisher, remained an unattainable goal. Until, that is, Joe Quesada put Editor Tom Brevoort on the case.

"My mandate to Tom Brevoort was simply, 'Keep things moving forward,'" Quesada says. "I knew that slow, steady progress was the key to getting the deal done. Tom managed that, and is still managing it. If they withheld approval, we gave approval. If they needed art, we sent it the same day. Tom is probably the only guy in the company who could make this happen. And it's happening."

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Mary Jane Watson-Parker

Sometimes, offstage is the best stage to be on. Mary Jane Watson-Parker, the wife of Peter Parker, took a powder in March, leaving the cast of the *Spidey* books. Leaving is valuable? Well, yes. There was this whole Spidey revamp, with writer J. Michael Straczynski at the helm, coming up. Both JMS and *Spider-Man* Editor Axel Alonso wanted Spidey to "swing solo" for a while, and removing the internationally acclaimed supermodel wife also helped bring Peter Parker back to his roots as a "lovable loser." MJ valiantly stepped aside, paving the way for a new era of Spider-greatness. And hey! With movie writer/director and new *Amazing* writer Kevin Smith coming in for January 2003, maybe, just maybe, MJ will be back on the MVC list next year!

BY THE NUMBERS:

31	Marvel Comics published this month
4	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
25,000	Number of copies in the sold-out first printing of *Ultimate Spider-Man* trade paperback
18	Number of years between the first aborted *JLA/Avengers* crossover project and the announcement of the new *JLA/Avengers*
$750	Dollar amount that a Joe Quesada *Marvel Knights* cover sold for at the first ever charity auction for ACTOR (A Commitment To Our Roots) a charity that benefits old-time comic creators

Art by Kaare Andrews

kdrawdraws.com

TRYING ON A NEW 'CAP'

Captain America *gets 'Marvel Knights' treatment*

The newest of New Marvel clashed with the oldest of Old Marvel in March. And the results of the clash were more than a year in the making.

Marvel took its most venerable of venerable characters, Captain America, and handed it over to its edgy "research-and-development" wing, Marvel Knights.

"I read every stitch of fan mail we get, and fans *love* the character," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada says. "But they think maybe it's time to bring him into a more modern era of comics. Fans really want to see the character appreciated the way he should be. There's something about Marvel Knights that fans connect with, and we want to give Cap the showplace he deserves. This was no slight to those that had been working on *Cap*, it just meant that we needed a drastic move to shine a spotlight on the character!"

More than a year later, in April 2002, the new Marvel Knights *Captain America* #1 hit. New writer John Ney Rieber wasn't afraid to shake things up. "It is obvious that this is not the Captain America people are used to," Rieber says. "Someone out there is having conniptions over this book. If people are not upset, then I'm not doing my job."

Marvel bowed to tradition by selecting John Cassaday as the series' new artist. Cassaday, ironically enough, discovered Cap as a child on the Fourth of July. "It's a little embarrassing," Cassaday admits. "It's bizarre, but I was given a copy of *Captain America* #200 on July 4, 1976, when I was four years old. Cap has been my favorite character for most of my life, and has had a sincere effect on who I am."

Still, change is welcomed even by the new artist. "Cap has more on his mind than merely beating the super-villain-of-the-week senseless," Cassaday says. "He doesn't just fight for the United States; he fights for the enslaved citizens of this entire world. Our Captain America believes in the American standard, but you won't catch him delivering syrupy speeches. Our man's patriotic testosterone comes out with his angry fists, not endless rhetoric. He's a fighter, not a preacher. I want to give people a hero that you wouldn't screw with."

FIGHT

TERROR

Art by John Cassaday

MORE IS LESS. OR IS THAT LESS IS MORE?

Marvel sells more books by selling fewer books. Really.

In early March, Marvel President Bill Jemas issued his most controversial decree to date: except in rare cases, Marvel would not overprint its books to have extra copies available for reorder. The comic retailing community, accustomed to having a "safety net" of extra books available in case of sellout, was up in arms. Still, Marvel stuck to its guns, issuing this statement from Jemas:

"Contrary to popular belief, gross overprinting is not a time-honored comic industry tradition. In fact, Marvel's policy of overprinting/reprinting 10-20% of our line was implemented during the company's bankruptcy in a desperate, shortsighted effort to squeeze every last dollar out of every last book. The policy never worked. It was never penny-wise; it was always pound-foolish.

- Marvel added 15% to *our* annual manufacturing costs and passed those costs along to consumers as price increases. Consumers, of course, bought fewer books.
- Every year, Marvel spent several hundred thousand dollars to resolicit those books to stores, again passing along the costs and suffering long-term volume decreases.
- Most of those resolicited sales were at deep discounts, which punished any retailer who had been optimistic enough to make an aggressive initial order at full price.
- Then, Marvel would pay thousands of dollars to store the unsellable books.
- We would pay thousands more to *destroy* the unsellable books.
- Finally, overprints and reprints flat-out *gutted* the long-term value of any book that could have become collectable.

"Right now, Marvel makes enough extra copies to cover normal damages and mis-shipments. Beyond that, we do not overprint and do not reprint. I genuinely regret the inconveniences that this new policy has caused comic store owners. And frankly, Marvel misses the short-term revenue every bit as much as you do. But I do believe that Marvel is acting in all of our best long-term interests.

"This is the new Marvel. We can't be all things to all men, but we can make the best books in the business and sell them at the best price." Jemas further infuriated the retail community by referring to Marvel orders as an IQ test. The higher the order, the smarter a retailer must be. Despite retailer furor, the gambit worked. Retailers started ordering more Marvel books up-front, increasing Marvel's sales and making more money for storefront retailers.

Now Marvel's no reprint policy is making comics collectable again. And that is instant, cheap marketing for comics. Word of mouth spreads quickly among kids—*Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 was on eBay for $10, then $20, then $200. And a wave of new customers starts to show up in comic shops. Large retailers were in love with this, for obvious reasons.

However, industry pundits suddenly became very worried about another "speculator boom." "Joe and I are always telling them that what we need to avoid is the bust, not the boom. But we are not really addressing their concern. What these guys want to avoid is a bunch of new customers showing up in their stores and giving them noogies and a wedgie."

Jemas continued, "The retailers raising a stink were a vocal minority who didn't like new customers invading their turf. What was really going on was that the top retailers embraced the idea, but a few who shall remain nameless were architects of the insurrection." Jemas illustrates his point with an example.

"We called Chuck Rozanski at Mile High Comics because we knew we were going to take a load of crap. We said, 'Chuck, you're a respected guy and you're behind this idea. Why don't you write a letter supporting this?'

"Chuck said, 'Look, guys, I'm really busy. I love you dearly, but I've got a business to run. It's those other jokers who *aren't* doing a good business who are making all the mess on message board posts. I'm making money. I can't be bothered with that.'

"Case closed," Jemas says.

PUT UP OR SHUT UP

Todd tells Quesada to put up...for charity

The Quesada/McFarlane debate (see December 2000) had been going on for months, with Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada calling out former superstar *Amazing Spider-Man* artist Todd McFarlane in an effort to get McFarlane back to the drawing board. Quesada even promised—above and beyond whatever money McFarlane might make on a new comic—$1100 of his *own* money to get McFarlane's rump in gear. "I just felt like he could use the cash with Barry Bonds on the verge of making those McGwire balls worthless," joked the EIC.

Alas, it was not to be. McFarlane never returned to drawing comics.

But Quesada proved his money, once taken out of his pocket, was staying out. Quesada made an $1,100 donation to ACTOR (A Commitment To Our Roots) a charity that benefits old-time comic creators in need.

"I had some money for Todd," Quesada said as he handed over a check at the 2001 Orlando MegaCon. "Since he didn't want it, I think I found a better use for it."

McFarlane was never heard from again on the matter. But at least a charity made out okay.

Art by Todd McFarlane

MARVEL

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MA

VIEW ISSUES

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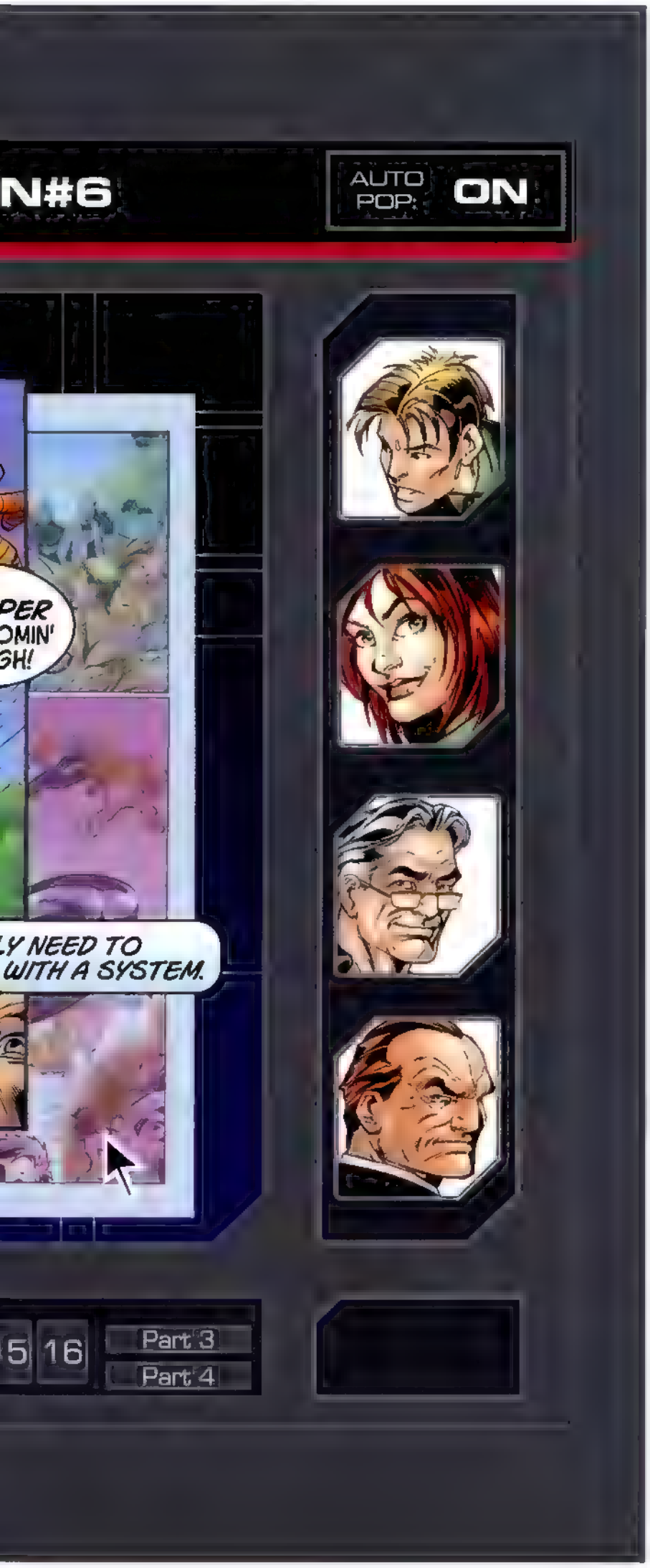
14 15

Part 1
Part 2

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14

ALL IN COLOR FOR...FREE!



Why less is more in the Internet world

The revolution started on March 14, 2001, the date the sold-out *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 debuted as a Marvel "dotComic." Again, naysayers were sure the project would flop. Who would pay for books when they could read them on the Internet for free? Surely these freebie versions would at least kill the already-established (and booming) value of back issues!

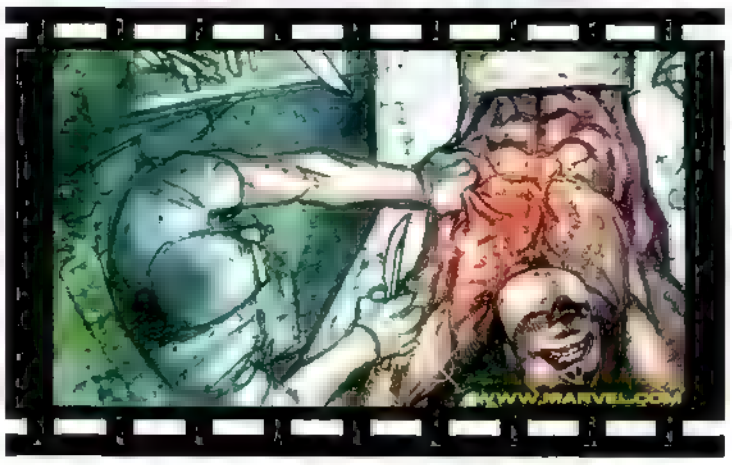
What some saw as stupid, Marvel saw as marketing. Cheap marketing, at that. "When the dot-com craziness was going on, Marvel had 15 people in-house, five full-time consultants, and two consulting firms, each making six-figure fees," Marvel President Bill Jemas says. "And we could not generate content to reach even one tenth the readership that the dotComics do."

The answer behind the popularity, Jemas thinks, is in sticking to what the company knows."The dotComics are what we do best—tell comic book stories," he says. "The dotComics are Marvel sticking to its knitting."

There's a lot of knitting going on. Marvel has made free dotComics available for most sold-out books, including *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Origin*, *Incredible Hulk*, and *Elektra*. And sales have risen for each title. There are now 1.4 million downloads per month of Marvel dotComics.

And ya know what? The entire library of *Ultimate Spider-Man* is now available free online. And *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 is still a $50 collectors item.

WEAPON X TRAILER



April

TREND: Revamping the catalog

By April, the New Marvel was up and running, and it was time to turn its attentions to revamping the company's most important sales tool: the listings in *Previews*, the order catalog published by Diamond Comics Distribution.

"Up to that point, the catalog process was upside down," says Marvel President Bill Jemas. "Editors and freelancers were trained to finish the interiors first, and do the covers last, ignoring the passionate pleas of Bill Rosemann and Jeff Suter, the guys who put the catalog together. Those two guys desperately needed covers to be completed on time for the catalog (i.e., three months in advance of shipping)."

Marvel revamped its deadlines and focused new attention on the catalog, as well as the covers, in general. Covers came in earlier for solicitation purposes, art was finally *all* in color, and a philosophy was changed! Marvel had flexed its most potent marketing muscle, and the result was increased sales once again.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: J. Michael Straczynski

There's no competition. Writer J. Michael Straczynski, who built a loyal audience with his *Babylon 5* TV show and proved that he could do comics as well with Top Cow Productions' *Rising Stars*, ruled the roost in April. Straczynski hit the ground running and rocked Spider-Man's world, adding the new supporting character Ezekiel and new villain Morlun, who immediately became two of the most popular characters in comics. He also twisted Spidey's origin, setting the Web-spinner up as an arachnid "totem" who battled other totems—witness Spidey villains such as the Lizard, the Scorpion, and Dr. Octopus. The twists were bold, and as Straczynski put his own stamp on *Amazing Spider-Man* from Page One. And fans loved it.

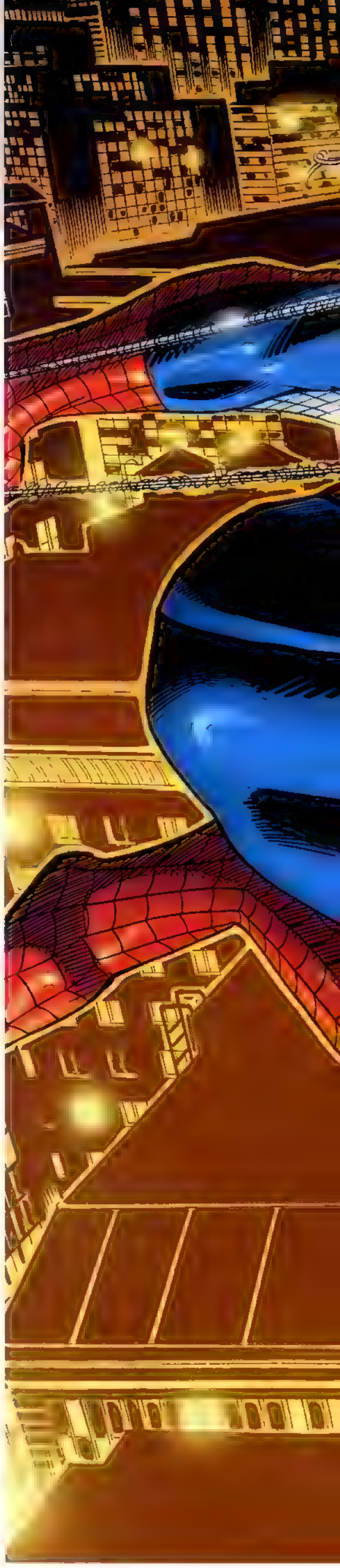
"What Joe did was nothing short of miraculous" Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada said. "April was merely the opening salvo in what would soon be the Spidey revolution. With a minimum of fanfare and marketing dollars, JMS immediately started down a path that would double Spider-Man sales."

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Spider-Man

With great power comes great responsibility. And with great marketing push, there also comes great responsibility. April was a mega-mega Spider-Man month, with the arrival of J. Michael Straczynski on *Amazing Spider-Man*, a new series, *Spider-Man's Tangled Web*, and a new direction in *Ultimate Spider-Man*. The triple dose of wall-crawling madness went over just fine with readers, as all three titles played to rave reviews. Once again, Spider-Man, Marvel's flagship character, proved to be the go-to guy when it counted most.

BY THE NUMBERS:

39	Marvel Comics published this month.
9	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
11	Number of slots up the sales charts *Amazing Spider-Man* climbed in April, moving from the industry's number 16 seller to its number 5 seller
49%	Increase in sales on *Amazing Spider-Man* from March to April
200	Number of autographed Ghost Rider prints artist Trent Kaniuga gave away to promote his upcoming *Ghost Rider* series at Los Angeles' famous Golden Apple comic store during an April signing



Art by John Romita Jr. and Tom Palmer

OUT ON HIS OWN

Ultimate Spider-Man *grows up*

There was no questioning the success of *Ultimate Spider-Man*. Issues #1-#3 sold out immediately, and quickly needed to be reprinted in *Ultimate Marvel Magazine*. A paperback collection of #1-#7 was published just *six weeks* after #7 hit stands. Things were going *great*. So what did writer Brian Michael Bendis do? Change.

"*Ultimate Spider-Man* #8 was the first real big step away from the original Stan Lee mythos," Bendis says. "It was the start of the road to *define* this book and make it different from the regular Spider-Man."

The first seven issues dealt with the new Ultimate Peter Parker getting powers and coping with the loss of his Uncle Ben, much in the same manner as the original 1963 Spider-Man. The first arc was freely adapted from the original source material. To take the first step, Bendis first had to step into the mind of a teenager.

"He's 15 years old," Bendis says. "When I was 15 years old, I had all the exuberance and enthusiasm in the world. I mean, *I'd* put on that costume and run around if I had these powers. But I'd suck at it. And so Peter would suck, to a degree."

Sure enough, *Ultimate Spider-Man* #8 featured Peter going after the Kingpin of Crime, the man responsible for hiring the burglar that killed Uncle Ben. "And he gets his ass handed to him," Bendis laughs. "Think about it—This is the adult world, and he's still just a kid."

Audiences loved the brand-new material even more. Sales continued to climb on *Ultimate Spider-Man* as readers got to know Peter Parker all over again. "It's a character book, so I do 'character events,'" Bendis says. "It's what the book is about."

Art by Mark Bagley

J. MICHAEL STRACZYNSKI

Sci-fi guy goes buggy

It started with a chance meeting at a comic convention. *Babylon 5* TV writer/producer J. Michael Straczynski met Marvel President Bill Jemas at a comic con in 2000. Jemas inquired if Straczynski had any interest in playing in the Marvel Universe. "Naturally, I said yes," Straczynski said, "though I didn't have any clear notion of what I'd like to do."

Jemas turned things over to Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada, who had a *very* clear notion. "Joe asked if I would like to do *Amazing Spider-Man*," Straczynski recalls. "My response to him: Are you *serious*?" Quesada was, and Straczynski got nervous. "I have a hard and fast rule: I don't take on something unless I feel I can do it right. I had to weigh that, knowing that a lot of people would be looking to see what I did with the character. It was...well...a great responsibility."

Before Straczynski grasped the great power, he spelled out what he wanted to do with the character. "Some of it was fairly challenging stuff," Straczynski said. "To my surprise, Joe came back with absolute and enthusiastic approval of everything I set forth. At that point, how could I say no?"

When Straczynski took over as writer on *Amazing Spider-Man* with April's #30, things changed in a big hurry. "The thing about the original Spider-Man tales was that you'd introduce some new, fantastic character—Sandman, Electro, Doc Ock, the Vulture—and next month it'd be somebody *else* fantastic," Straczynski says. "But these guys have gotten recycled endlessly. I'm looking to break new ground rather than fertilize old ground."

And Straczynski did, with a new villain named Morlun and a new mentor named Ezekiel. Fans responded enthusiastically to the JMS take, and to the new characters. And Straczynski had a good time himself. "I've always liked Spider-Man's character, but in recent years it's gotten so buried under layers of detritus that it's hard to *see* his character anymore," he says. "I'm trying to unbury him, and discover new things. I'm just trying to have fun with this, on the theory that if I have fun, others will as well."

Art by J. Scott Campbell (left) and John Romita Jr. (above)

WHAT A TANGLED WEB WE WEAVE

Axel Alonso brings Spidey to strange places

What if Spider-Man existed in the real world? According to editor Axel Alonso, he'd be two people.

"Spider-Man might save your life…or knock you on the head, depending on what side of the law you come down on," Alonso says.

To chronicle the many sides of Spider-Man, Alonso created a new series that was actually a series of series—*Spider-Man's Tangled Web*. The series showcases Spidey's effects on other people as if he were real—and brings yet more new talent into Marvel. *Tangled Web* kicked off with a three-issue arc titled "The Thousand" by writer Garth Ennis and artist John McCrea, the pair noted for insanely high levels of mayhem in AOL Comics' *Hitman*. "I just approached Garth and said, 'You have free rein. Let's have some fun,'" Alonso recalls. He also recalls this extra bit of convincing was necessary. "I had to buy Garth more than a few pints."

Tangled Web is designed to run between one and four issues per story, with different creators handling each arc. Tales have ranged from the hard-hitting "Severance Package" to the light-hearted "Sandman's MTV Beach Party."

"It's everything from super-villain stories to two-bit hoodlums swapping tales over whiskey," Alonso says. "I know a little about Spider-Man, but not all 40 years of his history. This is a series for someone like me."

Art by Glenn Fabry (right) and Duncan Fegredo (above)

GLENN FABRY

May

TREND: Cracking the Code

The Comics Code Authority was like the weather: Everyone complained about it, but no one seemed to do anything about it. In May 2001, Marvel finally did something about it.

Marvel dumped the Comics Code Authority, the antiquated self-censorship vehicle for comics that came into place in 1954 and had been revised only once, in 1971. There was no single straw that broke the camel's back in Marvel's decision. Instead, the reasons were many: a flap over the content of *X-Force* #116 (see below); Marvel's plans to launch a "mature readers" imprint in September; and most of all, the notion that the Code, which seemed vitally important to comics in 1954, just didn't matter anymore. "There's really not a Code, and there's really no authority," Marvel President Bill Jemas said at the time. "This is an environment we don't want to live in."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Grant Morrison

The Children of the Atom got an atomic-powered imagination in May.

Grant Morrison had already done it all in comics. The Scottish-born scribe was well-known for mind-bending tales on AOL Comics' *Doom Patrol* and *The Invisibles.* He had parlayed these art-house successes into a gig writing AOL's *JLA*, the team book featuring such mainstream heroes as Superman and Batman. But after a flap alienated Morrison from AOL, Marvel scooped him up and put him to work on the biggest stage of all—*The X-Men.*

Morrison supercharged the mutants with new attitude and deadlier foes. The move immediately paid dividends. Morrison's *New X-Men*—already the third-best-selling book in the industry—rocketed up 40% in sales for May to become comics' top-selling book, amid rave reviews. A new era began with Marvel's most visible property, and it was Grant Morrison's era.

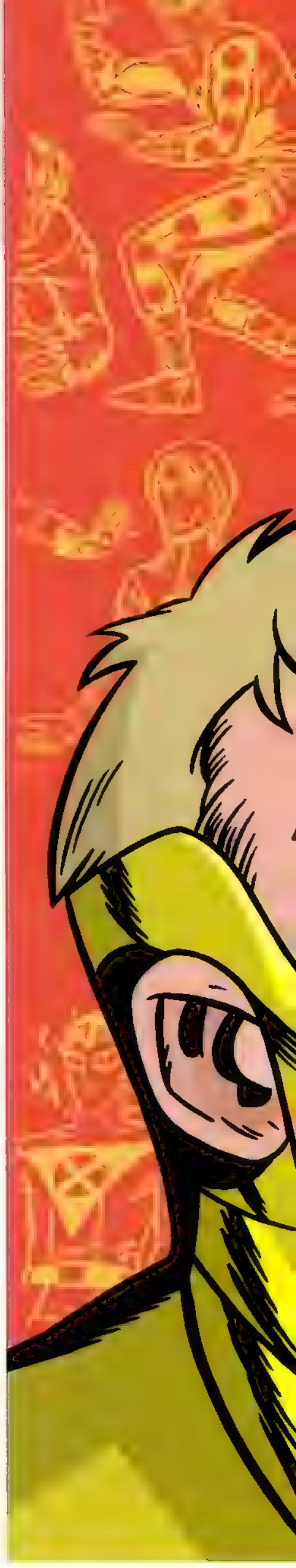
MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Zeitgeist

Perhaps no character who appeared in *just one issue* ever had as much impact. Zeitgeist was introduced as the leader of the all-new, all-different X-Force in the pages of *X-Force* #116. The revamp of the book promised high-octane excitement and a danger factor turned up to 11. After an entire issue established Zeitgeist as the pivotal man for the new *X-Force*...he died on the issue's final page.

The message was clear: Marvel was walking the walk and not just talking the talk on this book. Zeitgeist's untimely—and unlikely—demise proved that "anything goes" truly meant *anything* goes for the new *X-Force.*

BY THE NUMBERS:

38	Marvel Comics published this month
14	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
$600	Amount one copy of the white-variant-cover version of *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1 graded 9.8 by Comics Guaranty Corporation, earned at an auction on May 26
2	Different blurbs found on the cover of May's *X-Force* #116. Newsstand copies said, "Parental Advisory: Contains Mature Content," and direct market editions said, "Hey, kids! Look, no Code!"
23	Characters killed in the pages of *X-Force* #116

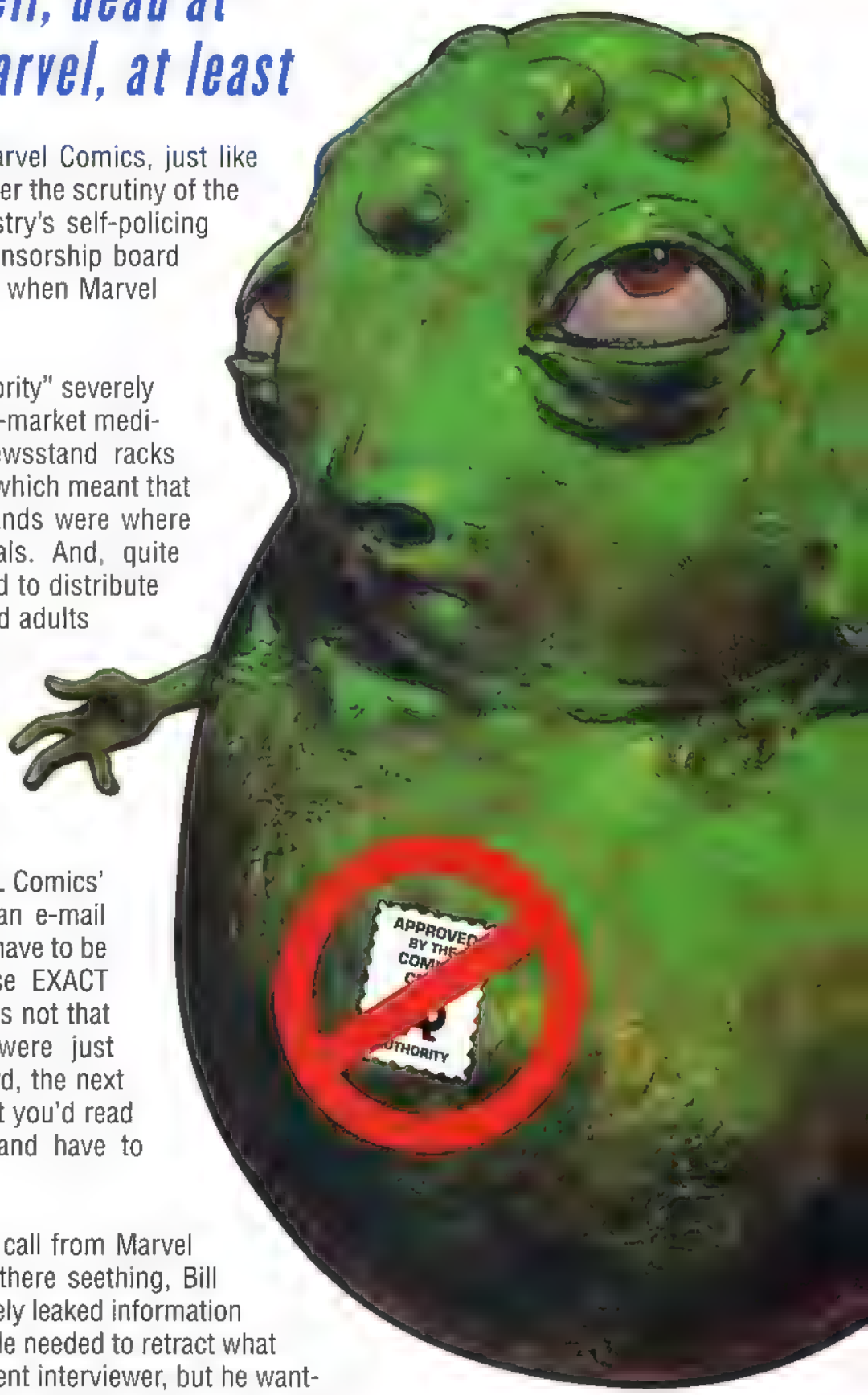


Art by Mike Allred

DING DONG, THE CODE IS DEAD

Well, dead at Marvel, at least

Forty-seven years was long enough. Marvel Comics, just like nearly all comic publishers, labored under the scrutiny of the Comics Code Authority, the comics industry's self-policing vehicle that had acted as a review and censorship board since 1954. It labored, that is, until May, when Marvel dropped the Code.



For generations, the self-proclaimed "Authority" severely hampered the growth of comics as a mass-market medium. No book would be allowed on newsstand racks unless it bore the Code seal of approval—which meant that it had to be a "kids'" book. But newsstands were where teens and adults shopped for periodicals. And, quite simply, comic companies were not allowed to distribute their teen and adult books where teens and adults could find them. No surprise: Paul Levitz and his people at AOL Comics were the main enforcers of the Authority.

Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada was "seething" about the Code. Remembering a day in April, he said, "I had just finished reading an issue of AOL Comics' *Superman*, and that morning, I received an e-mail from the Code saying certain words would have to be changed in one of our books. And those EXACT words were in the *Superman* I just read. It's not that the Code was playing favorites, they were just inconsistent. One day you could use a word, the next day you couldn't. It didn't surprise me that you'd read a word in a Code-approved *Superman*, and have to change the same word in *X-Men*."

Fortune intervened in the form of a phone call from Marvel President Bill Jemas. "Just as I'm sitting there seething, Bill called in a blind panic because he prematurely leaked information about the *Alias* comic during an interview. He needed to retract what he said because it was promised to a different interviewer, but he wanted another exclusive to give this reporter. I said, 'Screw it. How about this Code? Tell him we're thinking about leaving it!'"

Jemas agreed. The time had come, and Marvel withdrew from the Code in a tense meeting with the Authority and its constituent members in May. AOL Comics Publisher Paul Levitz was at that meeting.

"I started the meeting by saying, 'Paul, I'm going to be honest with you. We're here to make money and have fun. That's been the theme in everything we've done since September. The Code doesn't make us any money, and it *certainly* is not fun. We don't think we should be part of this any longer,'" Jemas recalled.

Quesada says they got many warnings from "the old men of the industry." "They told us the government would come down on us, that Wal-Mart wouldn't take us, that the newsstand won't carry us, all sorts of scary things. I vividly remember the crew from Archie literally whipping out yellowed press clippings cut

Art by Sean Phillips

from newspapers in the 1950s! That's when I knew what a joke all this fear over the Code was. I'll never forget when Bill turned to Paul and said, 'I'm much more scared of Sentinels than senators.' "

At the press conference announcing the decision, Jemas clearly stated his beliefs; "There is something rotten about a system that says there is something wrong with a book that doesn't bear the stamp of the Comics Code Authority. Frankly, that's just bull——. If you look at other countries around the world, where publishers have not suffered under Code censorship, comic books have become a significant, interesting, lively, mainstream form of media with a tremendous amount of creative freedom and widely diverse offerings. We've just been afraid to go out there and make a bold move as a comic book business." Quesada added, "I firmly believe that the Code is the reason that only in the US are comics strictly perceived as a child's medium."

Things went off without a hitch as Marvel implemented its own, non-Code ratings system. "We've proved that all that Code stuff is smoke and mirrors, 'cause nothing bad has happened," Quesada says. "The Marvel ratings system has been working just fine."

FROM 'PG' TO 'PARENTAL ADVISORY'

Behind Marvel's rating system

PLEASE NOTE: THIS IS AN INTERNAL DOCUMENT ONLY, NOT FOR GENERAL RELEASE. SPECIFICS LISTED HERE ARE STILL SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

Marvel ratings system – 2001
Revised 5/23/01

General notes:

- Exercise restraint with language; don't use an allowable word just because you can, and keep the harsher words to a few occurrences per issue. When in doubt, ask Joe.
- These are only rough guidelines. Some books within the PG category should be more kid-friendly than others; this will be worked out between the individual editors and Joe.
- PG+ books should be carefully labeled for the kind of con tent they have (i.e., *Punisher* has violence, but not sexual content). All warnings and labels will remain the same from issue to issue of a given comic.
- The final category, Mature Readers (equivalent of "R"), is intended only for the MAX line. No title bearing the "Marvel" label should be in this category.

MARVEL PG — VIOLENT CONTENT

MARVEL PG+ — MATURE CONTENT

MARVEL MA — EXPLICIT CONTENT

PARENTAL ADVISORY EXPLICIT CONTENT

Art by Frank Quitely.

ENTER THE MORRISON

Quesada finally gets some guts

Grant Morrison, the wild-eyed Scotsman, entered monthly Marvel work and kicked off an X-revolution with *New X-Men* #114 in May.

"I'd known Grant for a while, but never had the courage to work with him," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada admits. But a trial balloon on the Morrison-written *Marvel Boy* limited series opened the door.

"The concepts Grant threw out there in *Marvel Boy*—some just little giveaways he glossed over—were good enough to have based entire comic *universes* on," Quesada says. "After that, I called up Grant with a carte blanche offer, asking what he wanted to do. I told him, 'Do you want one of the *Spider-Man* books? Hell, we only got two right now, but if you want one, we'll create a third for you.' Grant didn't miss a beat. He said, 'I want *X-Men*.' It was that simple. He gravitated to his strength, a team book that could play on a global scale. Even when I was drawing *X-Factor* oh so many years ago, I was never an *X-Men* reader. I always found the books impenetrable. Grant changed all of that for me, not as EIC, but as a reader!"

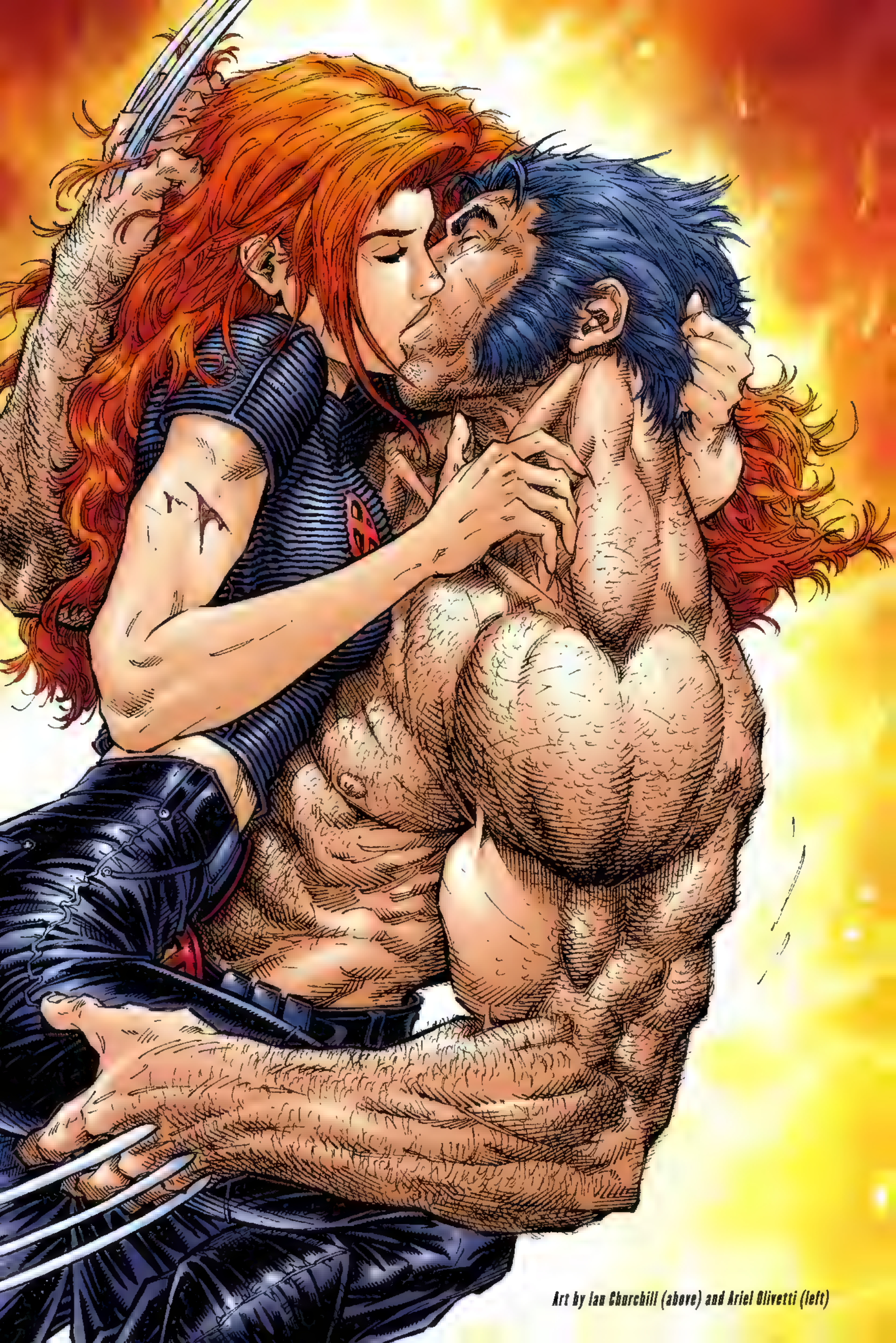
BELIEVE THE HYPE

X-Men *delivers, in all its flavors*

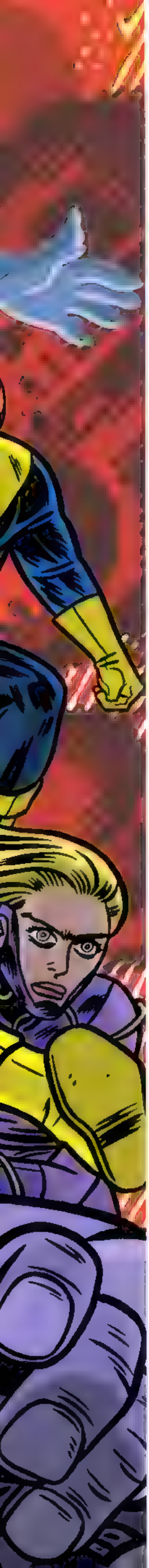
Readers looking at the cover of *Uncanny X-Men* #394 had to know: This was not the *X-Men* fans were used to.

"Look, we had a highly successful *X-Men* movie out the previous year and an *X-Men* comic that didn't look anything like the highly successful movie," says Marvel President Bill Jemas. "Something had to be wrong with that, and 'Fix the *X-Men*' became a top priority."

In May, the home improvement project began. Amid a heap of hype, "new look" *X-Men* books debuted with new costumes, edgier art, and new directions. Readers flocked to the books and sales skyrocketed 20 to 25 percent from April to May. In one month, the *X-Men*, a franchise thought by many fans to be fat, old, and complacent was recharged, re-energized...and arguably better than ever!



Art by Ian Churchill (above) and Ariel Olivetti (left)



THE BLACK OPS SPORTS TEAM

Marvel goes art-house for a mainstream hit

The *X-Men* line was becoming more and more uniform, insular and confusing. With few exceptions, the books focused on good mutants fighting bad ones; story arcs never really began or ended and you couldn't understand any one book unless you had already read 20 others.

"*X-Men* stories should be ripped right from the front pages of the *New York Times*," said Marvel President Bill Jemas to Editor Axel Alonso. "We need a hyper-realistic action-packed book." Jemas even wrote a couple of story outlines where the team was thrust into high-profile, no-win situations—going to Cuba to bring back Elian, saving the NRA headquarters from a band of armed gunmen, etc.

"If the New York Yankees were super heroes, they would be X-Force, that's the concept," said Axel at the time. "The sports analogy is convenient and it fits, but make no mistake, this is black ops all the way. The team goes on high-danger, high profile missions. The casualty rate is *gaudy*. There are seven members to start and there will always be seven members. When someone dies, there's a guy in the minors eager to take his place."

Alonso turned to an unlikely team, by Marvel standards, for the book. Veteran Vertigo/AOL writer Peter Milligan handles scripts, while alternative cartoonist Mike Allred takes on art chores. "I *love* Pete," Alonso gushes. "He excels because you think he's giving you the summer blockbuster, but he simultaneously slips the art-house movie underneath."

"The book was going to debut in May, and when Axel showed me samples of Mike's and Pete's work, I thought he was making an April Fool's joke," said Jemas. "Mike's style is 'cartoony,' not realistic, and in Pete's last gig at Marvel, he wrote Elektra as a ballet teacher. I know now I was being a boob—but at the time I didn't know enough to know how little I knew."

X-Force boasts a quirky-cool sensibility, *and* it was a sales blockbuster. And Alonso found he liked playing in the X-Men waters. "When I was told, 'Do an X-book,'" he laughed, "I asked, 'Do I have to?'"

The answer was yes. "So I started thinking about this in the broadest context I could," Alonso remembers. "Mutants have long been used as a metaphor for race in the Marvel Universe. So I thought, let's update that."

Alonso sees the new *X-Force* characters as pioneers, mutants living out in the open in a world that hates and fears them. "In many ways, they are the Jackie Robinsons of the mutant world," he says. "They're cashing in on having special skills. They play for the home team, and they're richly rewarded for it." And the public loves them, a concept Alonso said doesn't fly in the face of reality. "It's possible for someone to be a racist and still cheer for Michael Jordan or Tiger Woods," he remarks.

The new *X-Force* got its share of cheers...and jeers. "All the fan mail I got for *X-Force* the first month was negative," Alonso said. "And yet we saw *X-Force* jump 35.6% in sales that month."

The old fans may not have liked it, but many more new readers took their place. "This book is the poster child for the New Marvel," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada states. "Whether you like it or not, that book signifies what we're capable of doing."

Art by Mike Allred

TO THE X-TREME

Chris Claremont always has a home

The *X-Men* revolution would seemingly leave one key player out in the cold—Chris Claremont, the 20-year *X-Men* writing veteran who elevated the title from also-ran status to Marvel's most bankable franchise. But Marvel found a home for the best-selling fan-favorite writer, in the form of a new title crafted specifically for Claremont.

"Chris created a lot of stuff for Marvel. It's very tough to write a story for Marvel Comics and not somehow or another touch upon something he created," says Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. "That's just an incredible testimonial to the lovable bastard."

Claremont was given a new sandbox to play in, with his former *Fantastic Four* artistic partner Salvador Larroca in tow. Thus, *X-Treme X-Men* was born. The book focused on a core team of Claremont's choosing in a "road trip" setting. "Chris always has a hardcore following that's absolutely rabid for his *X-Men* stuff," says Quesada. "There's always a place for that."

Art by Salvador Larroca and Liquid!

June

TREND: Pimping Marvel Knights

June was the time for shining Knights. Marvel Knights was the "research and development" wing of Marvel co-founded in 1998 by now Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. It was here that established Marvel characters were sent for new spins and new creative takes. By June 2001, Knights had solidified its place as one of the most pivotal facets of the Marvel jewel and one of the most important imprints in all of comicdom.

"June was flat-out a Marvel Knights month," says Marvel President Bill Jemas. "We had some really cool stuff, including three major launches. When I entered Marvel, Knights was an inspiration for how to run the whole company. It was one of the pieces of Marvel that was working best, even in the worst of times."

Knights received huge exposure in June, when the imprint launched the new *Ghost Rider* and *Daredevil: Yellow* limited series while kicking off a new *Punisher* ongoing.

"Marvel Knights is probably the most 'powered down' area of the Marvel Universe, and that puts it a step closer to the readers," Editor in Chief Joe Quesada says. "Look at the Punisher. He's just a psycho with a gun. The closer the heroes are to a human power level, the more we find our readership relates to them."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Tim Sale

Artist Tim Sale broke new ground on one of Marvel's oldest characters.

When Sale teamed with longtime collaborator Jeph Loeb for the six-issue *Daredevil: Yellow* limited series, he painted the book's artwork in ink wash instead of using traditional line art. Sale's artistic take gave the "Year One" tale a classic, almost pulp feel that perfectly suited the book's tone and mood. *Daredevil: Yellow* was both an artistic and commercial success, with Sale's moody tones striking a chord with fans.

"Tim actually made that yellow outfit look cool!" said Quesada.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: The Punisher

In the early 1990s, the Punisher was one of Marvel's most popular characters. But overexposure led to overkill, and the character fell into limbo. Writer Garth Ennis and artist Steve Dillon changed all that with their 2000 limited series that proved so popular, the creative pair reunited for a *Punisher* ongoing in June 2001. The stripped-down *Punisher* was no-nonsense, guns-a-blazin' mayhem, and readers responded. *Punisher* #1 was the fifth-best selling book in the comic industry for June, trailing only four *X-Men* books.

BY THE NUMBERS:

44 Marvel Comics published this month

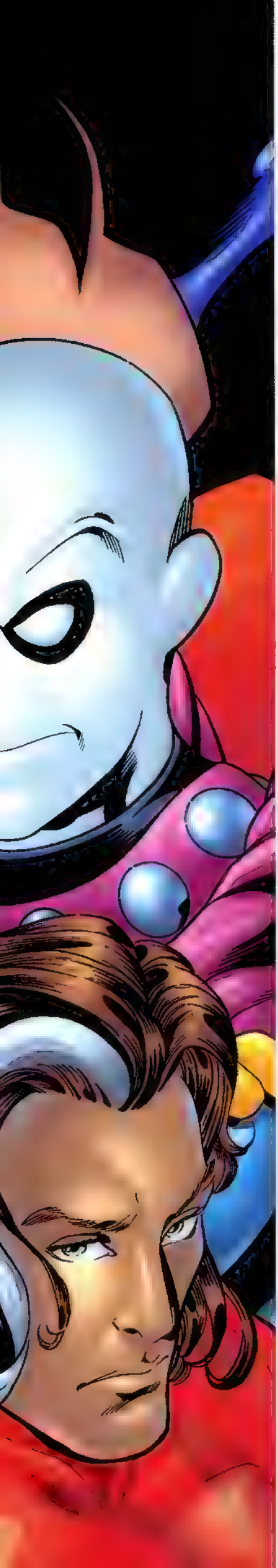
16 Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"

$15,000 Minimum bid when Marvel offered up its spiderweb-etched glass doors from their old conference room for sale via an eBay.com auction

19 Number of Marvel comics in Diamond Comics Distribution's top 25 best-selling books for the month of June

30% Increase in evil in Marvel's new *Ghost Rider* series over any previous *Ghost Rider*, according to artist Trent Kaniuga
(Note. This figure is an artist's approximation, not a scientifically based fact)

Art by Tim Bradstreet, Tim Sale and Trent Kaniuga



EXILES *INCLUDED*

Judd Winick symbolizes new blood

June saw the launch of *Exiles*, starring the popular *X-Men* character Blink and a cadre of *X-Men* odds and ends. But even more important than the book was the writer, Judd Winick.

Marvel Editor in Chief Quesada says, "This is a quality writer coming in." Winick had gained a degree of fame as a participant in MTV's *The Real World* and parlayed that into comic gigs at Image, AOL Comics, and Oni Press.

"One problem that Marvel President Bill Jemas and I had to combat here was that we had editors writing books, friends of editors writing books, and friends of friends of editors writing books," Quesada continues. "We had lost our edge. If you looked at every other comic book company, *they* were the ones looking for new talent and bringing in new writers, as opposed to just hiring someone who got promoted from being an intern, and eventually got hired writing a monthly book. Getting guys like Judd is important to our growth.

"What was also significant was that Judd came along with a pitch that was perfect for an X-Men Universe that was being pared down. We have close to half a dozen *X-Men* books that deal with time travel and alternate X-Men Universes. We needed to put an end to those titles because they were just causing more and more reader confusion and watering down the initial property. However, we realized that there was a very large portion of X-fandom enjoyed the alternate time stream stories. And that's where Judd's pitch for *Exiles* fit in perfectly. It was the perfect vehicle to tell those time travel stories in a really enjoyable way, so after clearing our plate we added *Exiles* to the menu. Based on the title's continued success, we made the right move!"

Art by Mike McKone

HAMMER DOWN!

A chance encounter leads an artist back to comics

Trent Kaniuga was the ultimate in "Whatever happened to..." Kaniuga was living the fanboy dream at age 16 in 1993. He had his very own, honest-to-Stan Lee comic: *Creed*, the tale of teenager Mark Farley, who has the ability to access a fantastical dreamworld. A well-placed article in *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* elevated Kaniuga to cult status—he became the young gun done good. Then, suddenly, he disappeared.

"I got a regular job," Kaniuga admits. "The company I was working for—JNCO Jeans—had these characters they wanted to get into entertainment media. I did the artwork for their pitches and presentations."

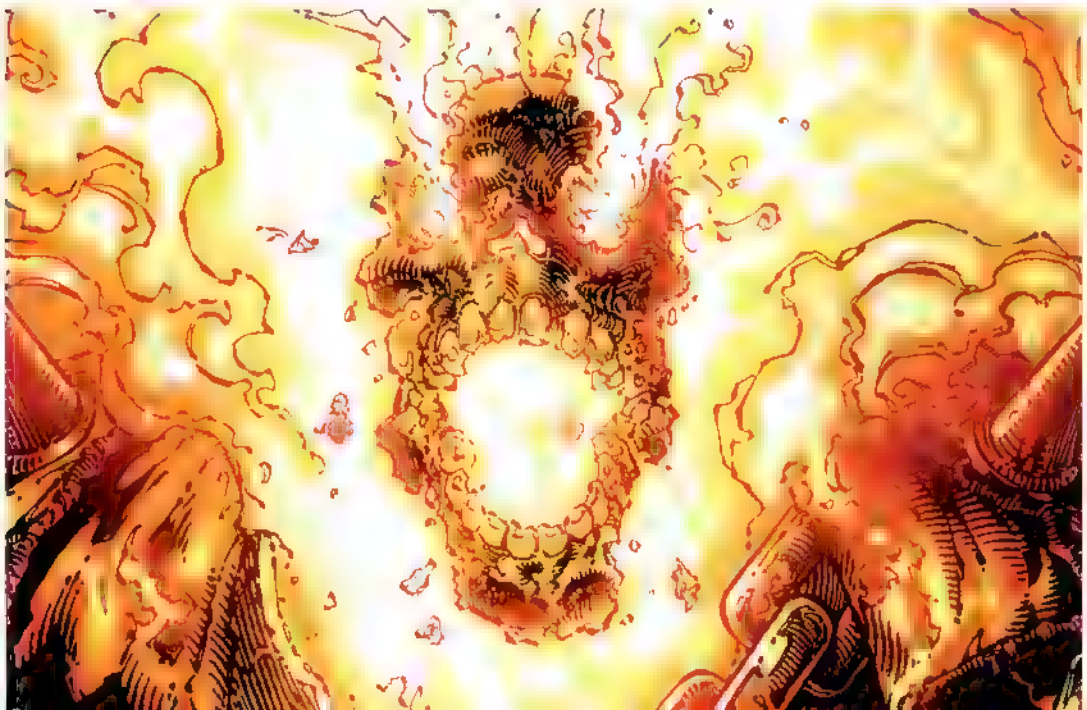
Kaniuga had all but forgotten about comics until one random comic dragged him back. "I don't know why, but I picked up an issue of *Daredevil* that Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada had drawn, and I wrote to him because it was *really* inspiring. I just started corresponding with him."

Kaniuga eventually sent Quesada a fat stack of portfolio work—paintings, rough sketches, the whole nine yards. Quesada saw that the 16-year-old had grown up.

"He really saw a lot of potential in it, I guess," Kaniuga says. "Then he told me Marvel was looking to bring back *Ghost Rider*, if only they could find an artist with the right style."

"Trent is a wonderfully unique talent. You can certainly see where the inspirations lie, but he takes them and makes them his own," says Quesada. "You can tell that he just enjoys sitting at a table and drawing; it shows on every page! This is a kid who doesn't take his God-given skills for granted."

With that, a Marvel icon rode again in *Ghost Rider: The Hammer Lane*. Kaniuga got back in the comic saddle as well—full time. He's now working on *Muties* and a painted *Thor* limited series for Marvel. "I think *Ghost Rider* is responsible for getting me back into comics," he says. "I don't know what I'd be doing if it weren't for that series."



Art by Tim Bradstreet (above) and Steve Dillon (right)

PUNISHER ON THE COUCH

Garth Ennis's psychological analysis of the character

Mayhem-minded scribe Garth Ennis started a new *Punisher* ongoing series in June, spotlighting Marvel's merciless killer of criminals. "When you think about it, he's the only super hero who's also a serial killer," Ennis says. "That's probably the only kind of super hero I can write month-in and month-out without going mad."

FEELING YELLOW

Loeb and Sale flash back to Daredevil: Year One

Longtime creative collaborators Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale teamed up to go back to the roots of *Daredevil* in Marvel Knights' *Daredevil: Yellow* limited series.

"[Marvel Editor in Chief] Joe Q. had been after us for a while to do something for the Knights," Loeb recalls. "It was a very sweet romance. Flowers. Beer. Large electrical appliances. Eventually, we gave in."

The pair decided to tackle *Daredevil*, and do so in a slightly different manner, artistically speaking. "Tim wanted to experiment with using ink wash for an entire story, having started using it in sections of [AOL Comics'] *Batman: Dark Victory*," Loeb says. "Since New York City was going to be a major character in the story, it seemed fitting to put it in a wash that would give it a texture that is unique to New York."

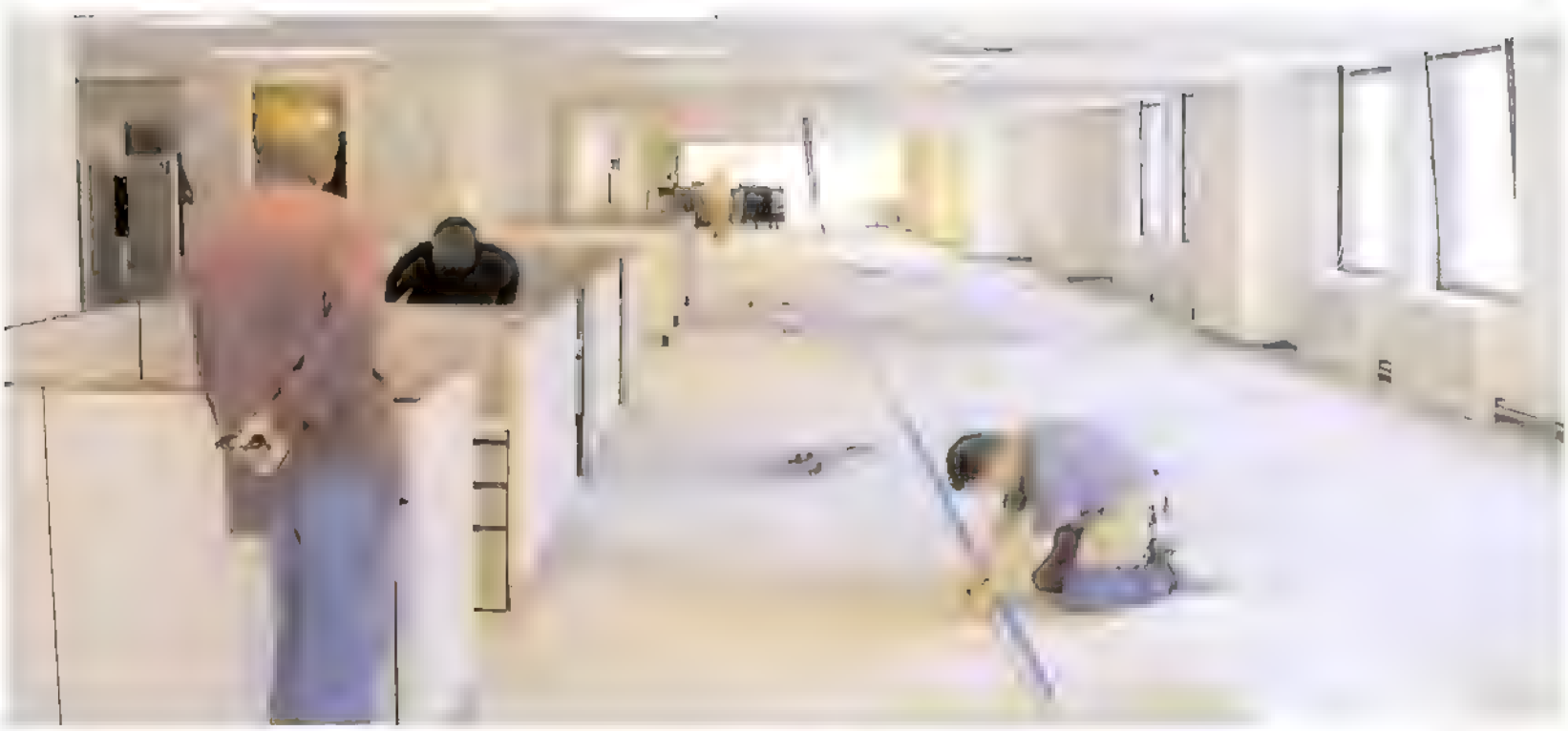
The art looked great. The acclaim—from one fan in particular—was better. "The nicest thing that happened was that after the series was finished, Joe Q. sent us a fan e-mail," Loeb recalls. "Since he'd become editor in chief, he wasn't 'on' the book, so he got the fun of reading it after it was done."

As a former *Daredevil* artist who had collaborated with writer Kevin Smith, Quesada keeps an eye on the Man Without Fear. "He didn't know we would cover why *Daredevil* changed from the yellow costume to the red one," Loeb says. "He was quite touched and a bit jealous that he and Kevin hadn't thought of it!"

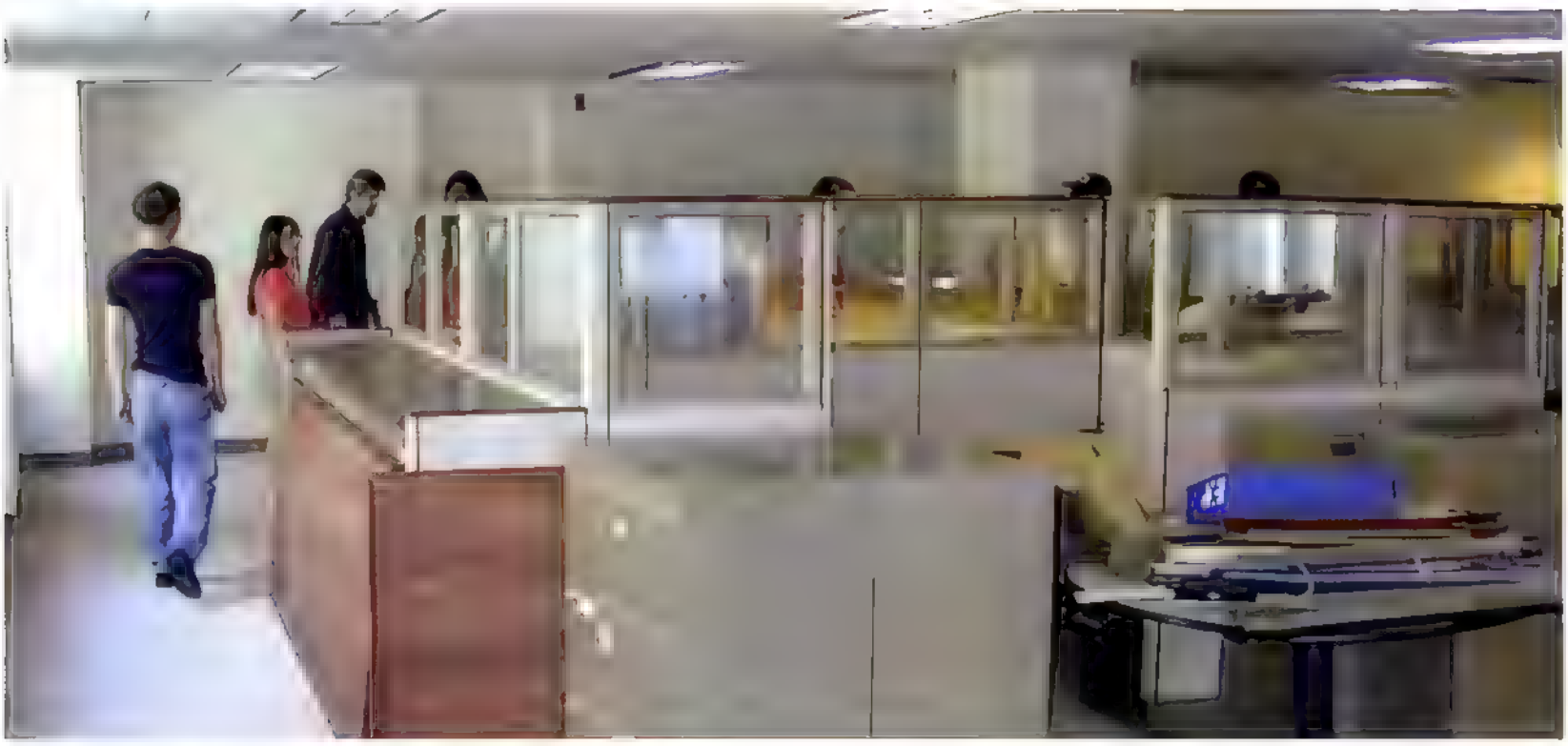
Proving that no good deed goes unpunished, Loeb and Sale did their best to assuage Quesada's jealousy. "We gave him that original page as a gift," Loeb says.

Art by Tim Sale

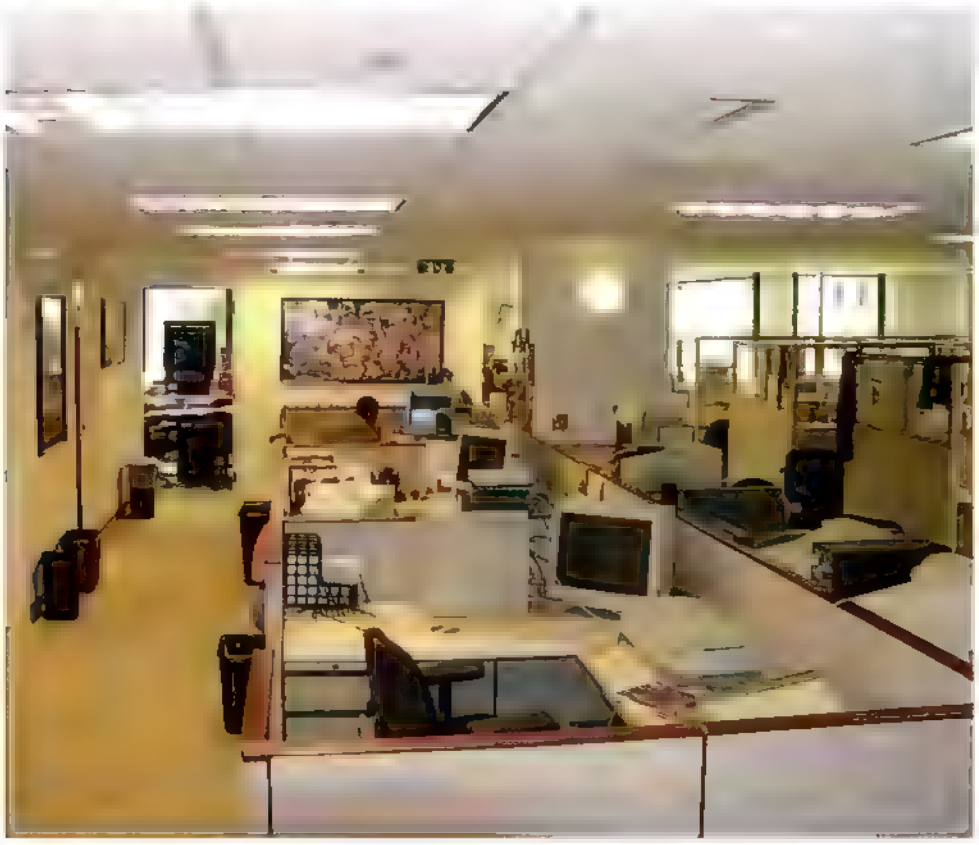
GYM
KURTZ
HATS
JB
CLEANERS
RUGS
ONE
FLIGHT
UP

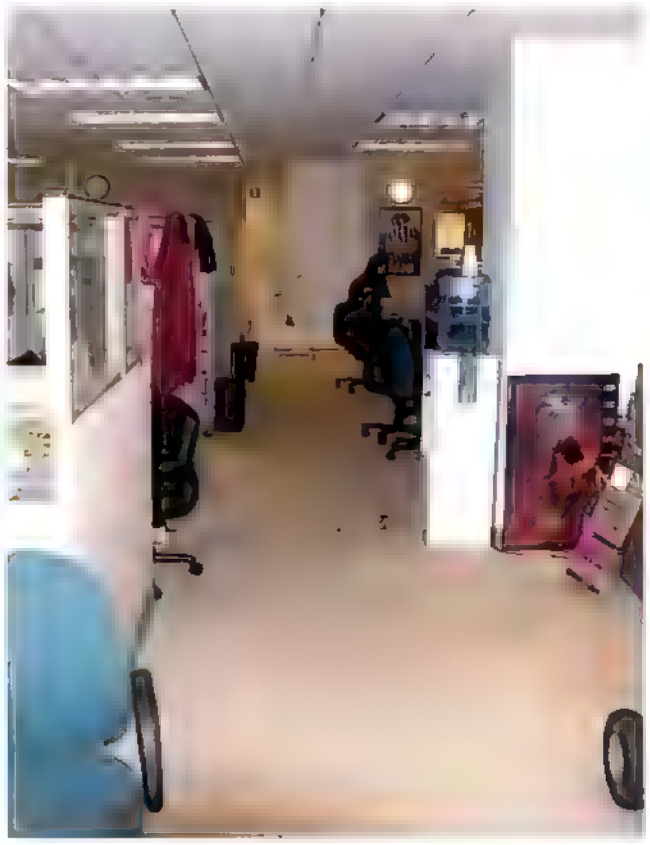


Editors' Row before the construction began.



The New Marvel Bullpen before the move.





The New Marvel Bullpen.

MOVING DAY!

Beloved Bullpen gets a makeover

Mighty Marvel was on the move in June, when the company migrated into new offices, leaving behind the digs at 387 Park Avenue South that it had occupied for many years. The move into a former bank office was only about 15 blocks in terms of geography. But it was a million miles in terms of attitude.

Nowhere was this more evident that in the beloved batty Bullpen, Marvel's production department. Dan Carr, an 11-year Marvel veteran and currently the company's director of production, oversaw the move.

"The old Bullpen was much bigger, but it was wide open," Carr says. "But the spaces we have here are nicer. There are actually walls and windows."

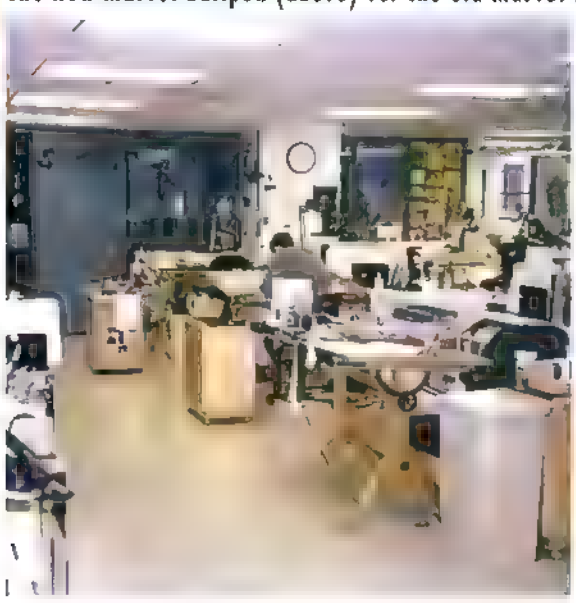
A change in address went hand-in-hand with changes in technology that had been bubbling over the last year, transforming the old paste-up operation into a gleaming new "Digital Bullpen."

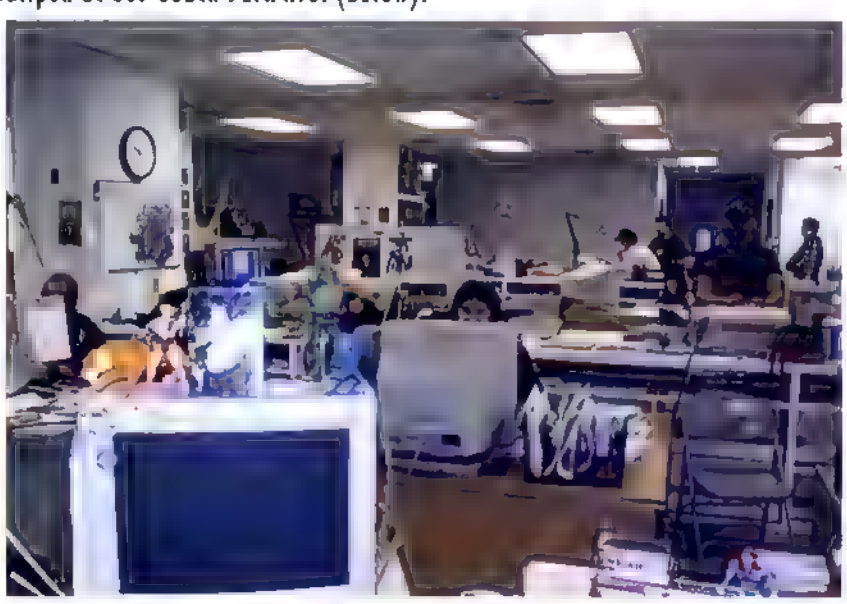
"The biggest change during the past year is that the Bullpen team does almost all of the pre-press work now," Carr says. That change makes everyone's job easier. "Everything gets done in one file before it's printed. We can tell on one digital file how *everything* is going to look on press, and output a single file for the editors to proof."

"You can't put anything out until it's been put together in the Bullpen first," Carr says.

Photos courtesy of Jared Osbourn.

The New Marvel Bullpen (above) vs. the Old Marvel Bullpen at 387 South Park Ave. (below).





July

TREND: Looking Outward

By July, pretty much all Marvel creative work was done by people outside Marvel's office walls.

"One of [Marvel President] Bill Jemas's original mandates to me was, 'You have to stop the internal freelancing. You have to stop editors from writing books,'" Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada remembers. Quesada got on the job, but not without some trepidation. "That put me in a precarious position," he laughs, "because I'm an editor who draws books. So it was a tricky dance to dance."

Marvel eventually decided that a hard-and-fast "no editors writing" rule might be well-intentioned, but ultimately unworkable. "So we did not say that editors cannot create or write anything here; their work just had to undergo 10 times the scrutiny," Quesada says.

Quesada applies the same standard to himself. "If an editor comes up to me now and says, 'Joe, I want you to do a cover for one of my books,' I make them prove to me, under no uncertain circumstances, that I am the perfect guy to do that book. If they can't, they get someone else. I spend a lot of time talking myself out of jobs."

But the bottom line is: more and better creators constantly coming from outside Marvel.

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Richard Corben

One of the "outside" creators flocking to the House of Ideas was legendary artist Richard Corben. The 30-year vet made a name for himself with stunning visuals on a number of independent comics, yet he had never really worked at Marvel. That all changed in July, with the publication of *Banner*. This haunting tale of the Incredible Hulk focused on the tortured soul of alter ego Bruce Banner, and the weight that hangs on his shoulders from knowing that ultimately, he is responsible for the Hulk's rampages. Corben's powerful art drove the story home, and yet another great creator entered Marvel's doors.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Elektra

Marvel made good on Jemas's earlier promise of "bad girls for fanboys," and the fanboys lined up around the block to get their hands on Elektra. Spurred on by a massive marketing campaign that included a 22-page preview in *Wizard* magazine, *Elektra* #1 came straight out of nowhere to debut as a top-10 industry seller and become one of the most talked-about books in comics.

BY THE NUMBERS:

45	Marvel Comics published this month
19	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
8,975	Number of consecutive *Amazing Spider-Man* newspaper strips Stan Lee wrote as of July 31, 2001 without *ever* missing a day
4	Elektra merchandise products released in July by Dynamic Forces in conjunction with the release of *Elektra* #1
3	Number of phone-in media press conferences held by Marvel for the comic book press in July

Art by Greg Horn

Greg Horn

THE BIG PUSH

'Elektra' knocks 'em dead

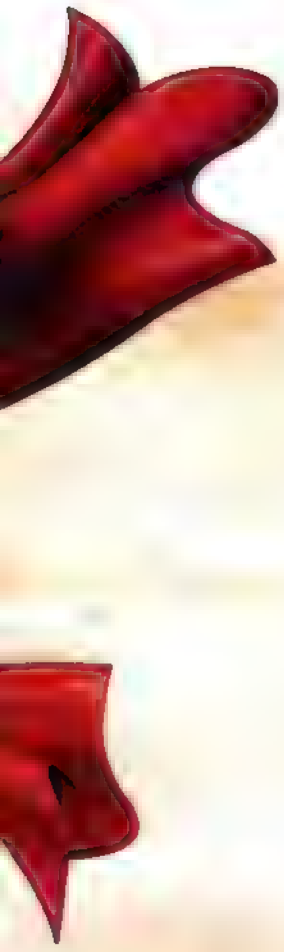
She had it all going for her: killer looks, killer attitude...and she was a killer. Marvel's femme fatale assassin, Elektra, was geared up for her July launch and all she needed was the right push.

"One unprecedented thing we did was this wonderful marketing ploy previewing the first 22 pages," Marvel President Bill Jemas recalls. *Wizard: The Comics Magazine* #119, which included the preview, sold over 200,000 copies that month, exposing the largest comic audience possible to Elektra.

"We'd seen a six-page preview of [AOL Comics'] *Green Arrow* #1 in *Wizard* before, and thought it was a cool idea," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada says. "So I said, 'Bill, let's do a six-page preview for *Elektra* #1.' He was like, 'Screw that, let's do the whole book.'"

Internal resistance at Marvel was huge—even from Quesada. "Our thought was that we *can't* do a whole book, because what are you going to sell later on?" he says. "So we added more content to the actual comic, which I think turned out to be the right decision."

The gambit worked. *Elektra* #1 debuted as a top 10 industry seller, and still remains the top-selling book with a female lead character in comics. "She is the top-selling female character on the planet," Quesada says. "No doubt due to the marketing push."



Art by Greg Horn (left) and Bruce Timm (above)

FOUR SCORE!

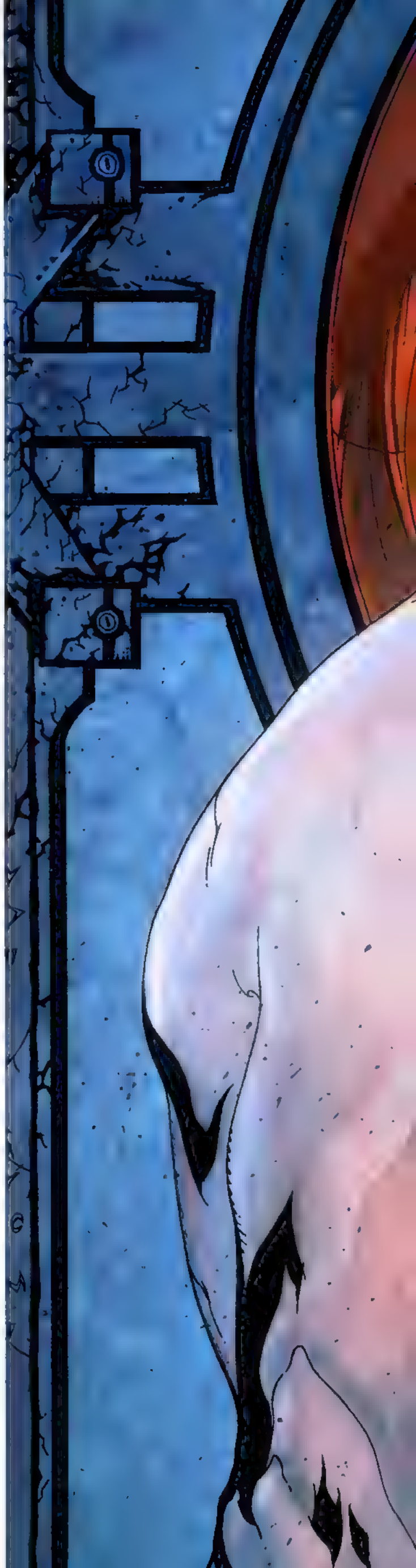
Grant Morrison and Jae Lee tackle the Fantastic Four

Two of the New Marvel's most singular voices took on Marvel's signature team in July.

The some-might-say-quirky team of writer Grant Morrison and artist Jae Lee combined forces to produce *Fantastic Four 1234*, a four-issue Marvel Knights limited series. As expected, the pair churned out a deep, introspective tale.

"It's their take on the ultimate *Fantastic Four* story," Editor Stuart Moore said. Each chapter focused on a specific team member, and each chapter reflected their particular quirks. The rocky Thing's story was designed to be "sort of hard and cold," according to Moore. "While the Invisible Woman's story is a little oblique, kind of vague. Any way you slice it, these guys cut right to the heart of the team and fans everywhere."

Art by Jae Lee and Jose Villarrubia



MARVEL FLIPS OUT

'Marvelscope' turns comics on its ear

"We all agreed comics should be more cinematic," said Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. "There were so many good artists working within the same confines, we

Art by Leneil Francis Yu

thought, if could we just make them *bigger*..." So Marvel rolled out another experiment to further challenge the best and brightest in the business. All that was needed was Quesada's gift for hyperbole. In record time, Quesada brainstormed the name—and thus was born the sideways-oriented Marvelscope format.

Instead of the standard vertical orientation, Marvelscope rotated comics 90 degrees, creating widescreen, panoramic views. Who better than Grant Morrison, the master of new ideas, could launch this new look? Morrison teamed with Leneil Francis Yu to produce *New X-Men Annual 2001*. Was it a success? You tell us—every *X-Men Annual* since has been done in Marvelscope.

ONE WAY OUT

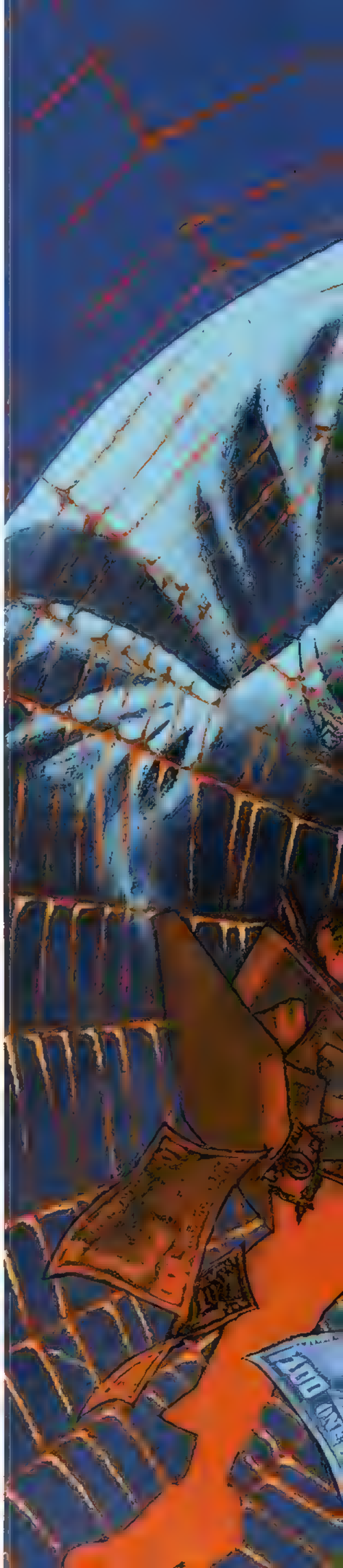
Spidey gets gritty with acclaimed underworld tale

Crime fiction writer Greg Rucka and gritty, stylistic artist Eduardo Risso laid it on with "Severance Package." Appearing in *Spider-Man's Tangled Web,* the tale showed that the *only* way out of employment when you work for the Kingpin of Crime is feet first. The critically-acclaimed tale wowed readers with its brutal honesty, and garnered much attention for Rucka and Risso.

"It's hard to say, but it's possibly the best book we did all year," says Marvel President Bill Jemas. "Definitely the best one-shot. It was amazing.

"Not that the Eisners ever paid much attention to Marvel books, but boy does this one deserve some sort of award!"

Art by Eduardo Risso



BAM

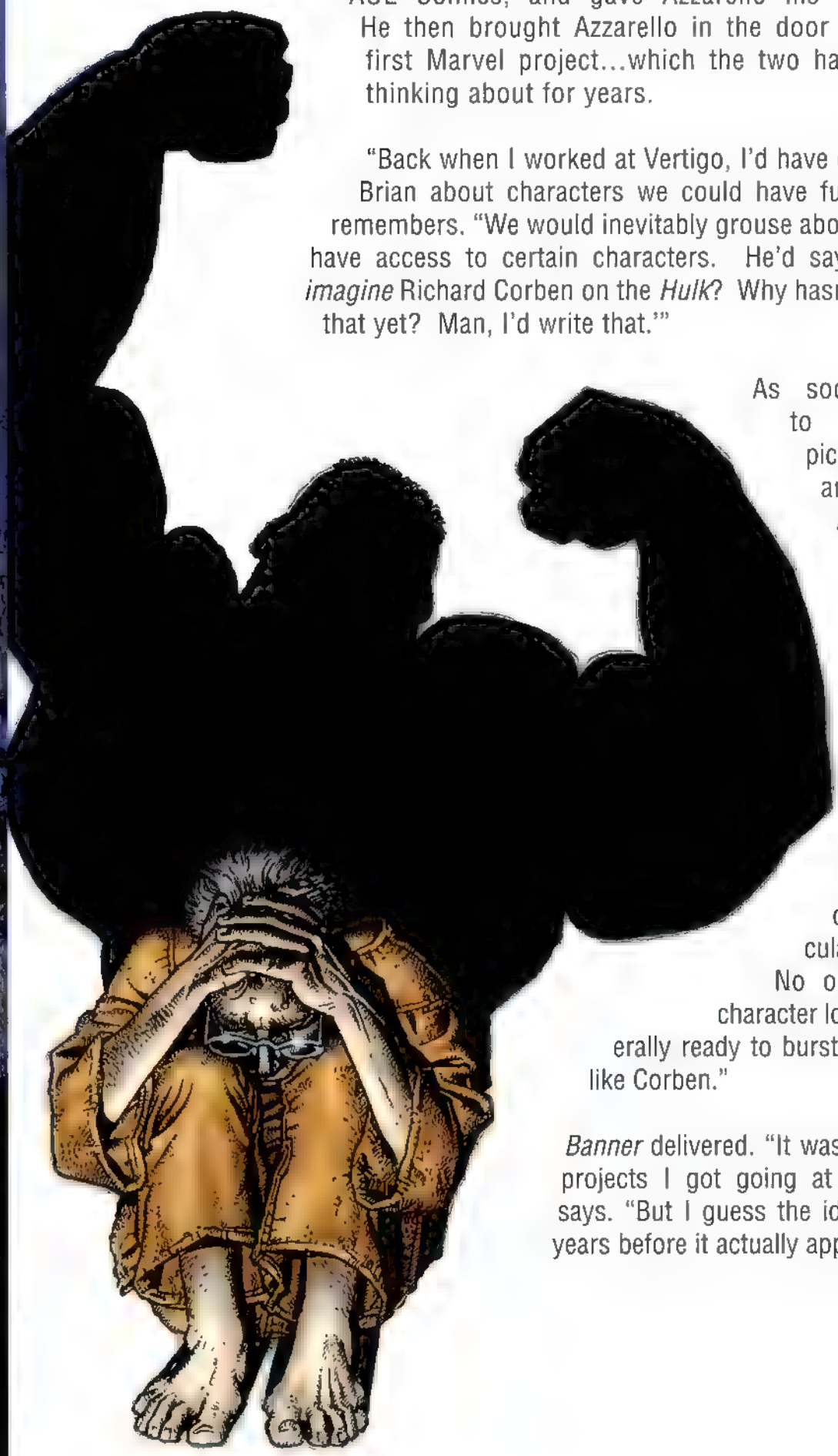
BANNER

LONG TIME COMING

When did 'Startling Stories' start? Back in the day...

Editor Axel Alonso inaugurated the out-of-continuity and out-of-your-mind "Startling Stories" line with *Banner*, a harrowing tale of the Incredible Hulk by writer Brian Azzarello and illustrated by legendary 30-year pro Richard Corben. Alonso actually "discovered" Azzarello when he was working for AOL Comics, and gave Azzarello his first pro work. He then brought Azzarello in the door for *Banner*, his first Marvel project...which the two had actually been thinking about for years.

"Back when I worked at Vertigo, I'd have discussions with Brian about characters we could have fun with," Alonso remembers. "We would inevitably grouse about how we didn't have access to certain characters. He'd say, 'Can you just *imagine* Richard Corben on the *Hulk*? Why hasn't anybody done that yet? Man, I'd write that.'"



Art by Richard Corben

As soon as he got to Marvel, Alonso picked up the phone and made sure Azzarello kept his promise. The project was, after all, destined.

"The Hulk was *meant* to be drawn by Corben," Alonso says. "No one draws overblown musculature like Corben. No one can make a character look like they're literally ready to burst out of their skin like Corben."

Banner delivered. "It was one of the early projects I got going at Marvel," Alonso says. "But I guess the idea for this came years before it actually appeared."

August

TREND: New Talent

Marvel spent the summer convention season searching out new and promising talent. A "New Talent Search" at the 2001 Wizard World Chicago and Comic-Con International: San Diego conventions turned up 174 entrants who pitched Editor Mike Marts scripts for an 8-page *Wolverine* story. When the smoke cleared, Jason Aaron, a 29-year-old newspaper reporter from Kansas City, walked away the winner. Aaron's 8-page story popped up in *Wolverine* #175 in April 2002.

Marvel has continued its search for both new writers and artists. "It's important to keep finding that 'next' guy," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada says. "I can't tell you how many guys I know who were around back during the industry's boom years, and who are *still* hanging around. With many of these guys, you look at their artwork now and it's all passé."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Peter Milligan

The newly retooled *X-Force* lived up to its promise of "anything goes." That means writer Peter Milligan lived up to *his* promise of "anything goes."

As *X-Force*'s first major story arc concluded in August, Milligan had killed off five team members, and shown botched suicide attempts, binge drinking, and even attempted murder within the ranks of the team. *X-Force* had gone from an also-ran to the ultimate buzz book in the business in a mere five issues, all under the guiding hand of Milligan.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Kevin Smith

Kevin Smith? Yes, Kevin Smith. The screenwriter/director and former *Daredevil* scribe was the focus of *First Kiss Comics*, a *New York Times* Sunday supplement drawn by none other than Joe Quesada.

"The *Times* wanted to do a fashion spread involving an actual romantic story," Quesada recalls. "So Kevin had come up with the idea to tell the story about how he met his wife, Jennifer." In the strip, Jennifer was dressed in the latest fashions on each page. Kevin did his part too, popping up in a different Marvel T-shirt in every panel. Quesada's contribution? Late nights.

"Kevin's schedule, the *Times*' schedule and my schedule were completely at odds," he recalls. "I literally had to do the thing in a couple of days. There were overnight stays at the office and stuff like that. But as it turned out, it was something that was seen by over five million people. So it got comics a lot of play."

BY THE NUMBERS:

43	Marvel Comics published this month
22	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
12	Number of Wizard Fan Awards (out of 17 total) won by Marvel creators and Marvel talent at the Wizard World Chicago convention on August 18
5	Number of printings Marvel's 1993 *Marvels* paperback had gone through as of August 2001
$7,500	Amount Alex Ross' *Universe X: Venom* painted cover garnered at an August auction benefiting ACTOR (A Commitment To Our Roots) a charity dedicated to helping older comics creators in need

Art by David Finch, Norm Rapmund and José Villarrubia

FINCH
RAPMUND
JOSE

THE ULTIMATE CARD GAME

Marvel gets gamey

If Ultimate Marvel were a game, what would it be? ReCharge. Marvel President Bill Jemas, who used to work at Fleer, is no stranger to the trading card world. In August, Marvel rolled out its first self-produced trading card game.

"ReCharge is a collectible card game that a Marvel fan can learn in five minutes and can play on very deep, strategic levels," Jemas says. He thinks that makes ReCharge similar to a successful Marvel publishing project. "It's the only collectible card game that has what chess has, which is a few simple rules and the ability to win based on your intelligence, pitting your game skills against the other player. Recharge basically is the Ultimate version of a card game."

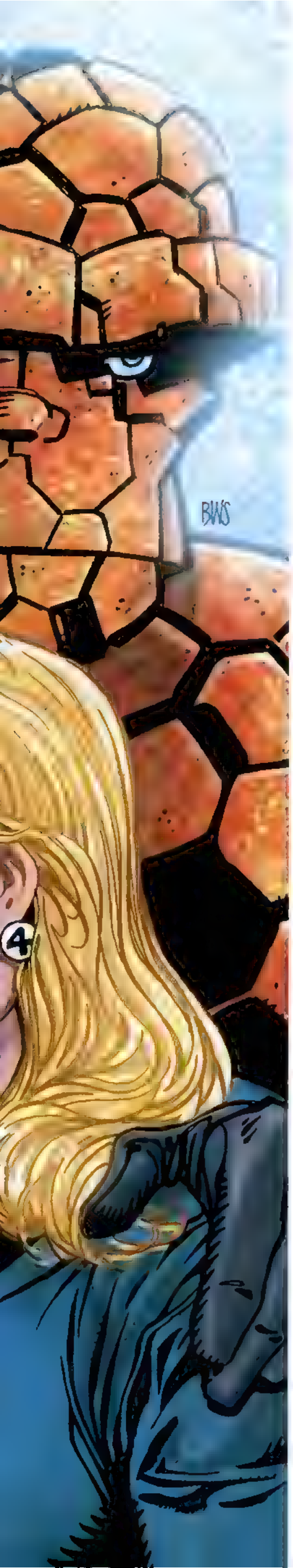
The track for Ultimate Marvel and Recharge may also be the same. *Ultimate Spider-Man* debuted amid their much naysaying from hard-line fans because it wasn't Spider-Man. But in one year, *Ultimate Spider-Man* had doubled its initial sales.

"Ultimates managed to gain acceptance in the comic book market, despite the objections of the loudest opinion-makers," Jemas says. "The initial shipment of Recharge met with the same grumbles in the game market. Recharge hasn't had the opportunity to succeed yet, largely because Marvel is not traditionally a powerful player in the game market."

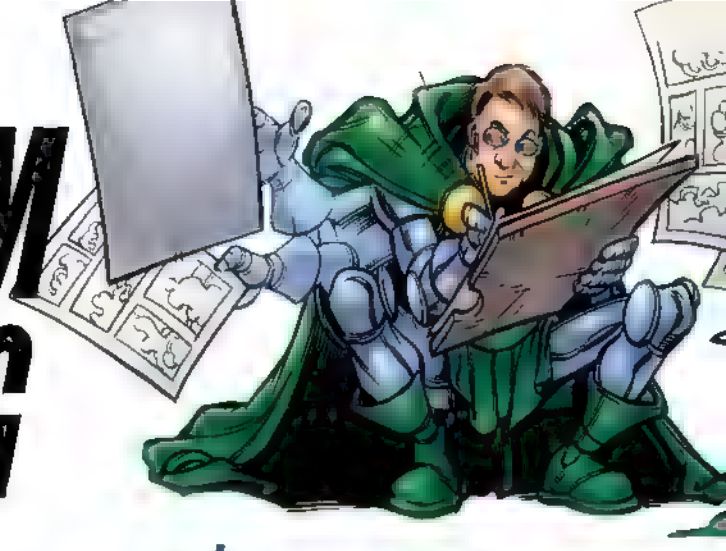
But Recharge is slowly trending up. "The collectible card game players who have sampled it seem to have liked it," Jemas says. "It's just a matter of getting the Marvel fans to try it."

MARVEL RECHARGE

Art by Salvador Larroca (right) and by Andy Kubert (above)



LEAVE 'EM LAUGHING



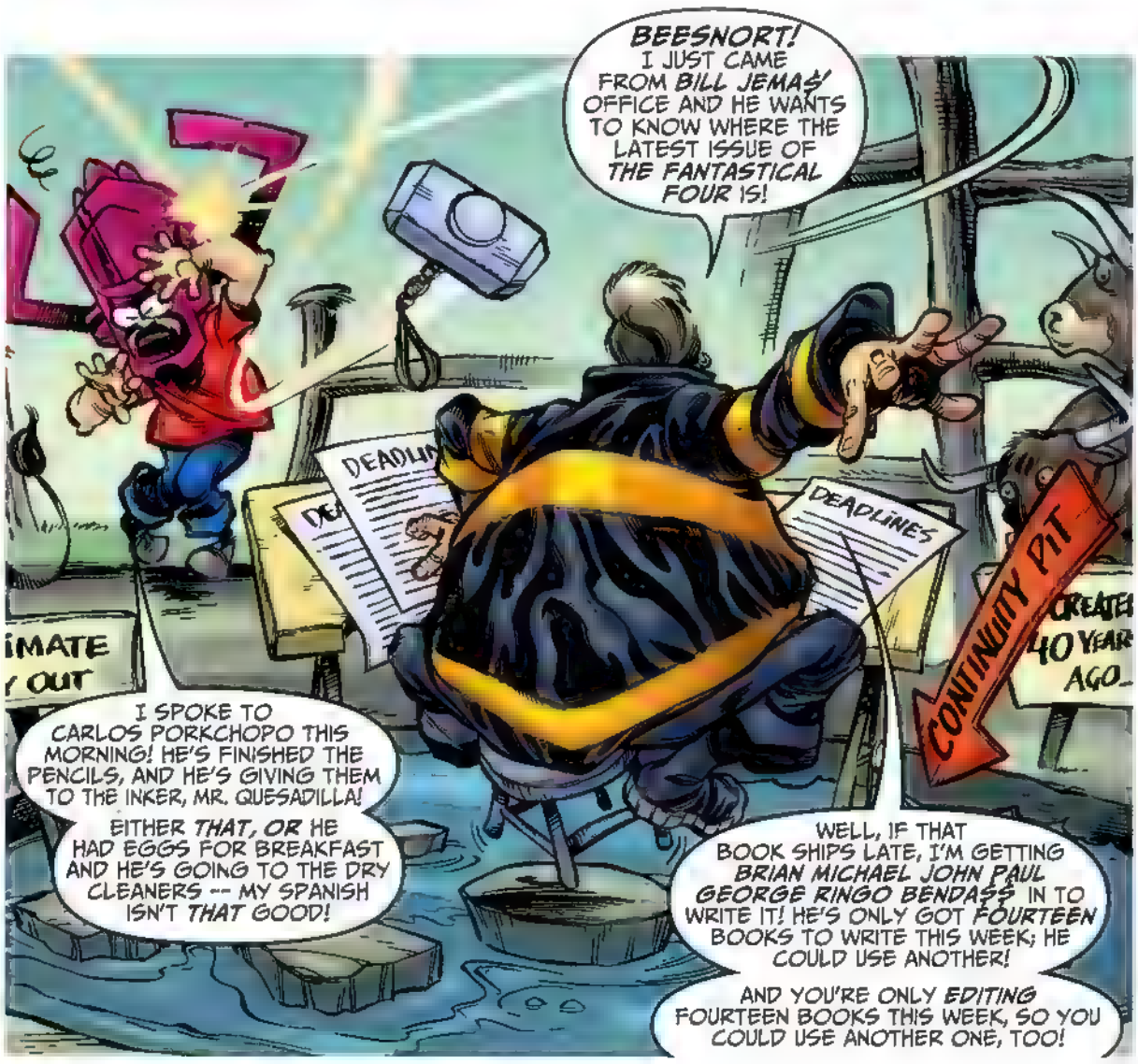
'FF' team bows out on an upbeat note

The happy trails were indeed happy for an outgoing *Fantastic Four* creative team.

Plotter/artist Carlos Pacheco and scripter Jeph Loeb announced they were taking their leave of the book in August. But the pair planned an interesting swan song. "I had a wonderful year working with Carlos Pacheco on *Fantastic Four*," Loeb says. "During the entire run, my hope was that I would get to do at least one issue with Carlos *drawing* one of my stories." Loeb got his wish.

Fantastic Four #50 contained a backup story—written by Loeb and drawn by Pacheco—straight out of Marvel lore and the days of Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. "Carlos and I were both fans of those little backup tales in the *FF Annuals* about how comics were *really* done back in the Stan-and-Jack day," Loeb says. "Stan would be wearing a Galactus helmet and Roy Thomas would be hiding under a desk and they'd be shooting ray guns at each other. Y'know, the *real* story."

The "real" story played out in the pages of *Fantastic Four* #50, a fun, little, light note to end the team's run together.


BEESNORT! I JUST CAME FROM BILL JEMAS' OFFICE AND HE WANTS TO KNOW WHERE THE LATEST ISSUE OF THE FANTASTICAL FOUR IS!
DEADLINES
CONTINUITY PIT
I SPOKE TO CARLOS PORKCHOPO THIS MORNING! HE'S FINISHED THE PENCILS, AND HE'S GIVING THEM TO THE INKER, MR. QUESADILLA!
EITHER THAT, OR HE HAD EGGS FOR BREAKFAST AND HE'S GOING TO THE DRY CLEANERS -- MY SPANISH ISN'T THAT GOOD!
WELL, IF THAT BOOK SHIPS LATE, I'M GETTING BRIAN MICHAEL JOHN PAUL GEORGE RINGO BENDAS$ IN TO WRITE IT! HE'S ONLY GOT FOURTEEN BOOKS TO WRITE THIS WEEK; HE COULD USE ANOTHER!
AND YOU'RE ONLY EDITING FOURTEEN BOOKS THIS WEEK, SO YOU COULD USE ANOTHER ONE, TOO!

Art by Barry Windsor Smith (left), Carlos Pacheco and Jesus Merino (above)

DOUBLE-SHOT OF SPIDER-MAN

Comedy writer on 'Spidey' project

The Marvel talent train picked up yet another new passenger in August: Hollywood comedy writer Ron Zimmerman.

Zimmerman spent years as a writer and frequent guest on *The Howard Stern Show* and as a writer and producer of Pamela Anderson's *VIP*. But his real love was always comics.

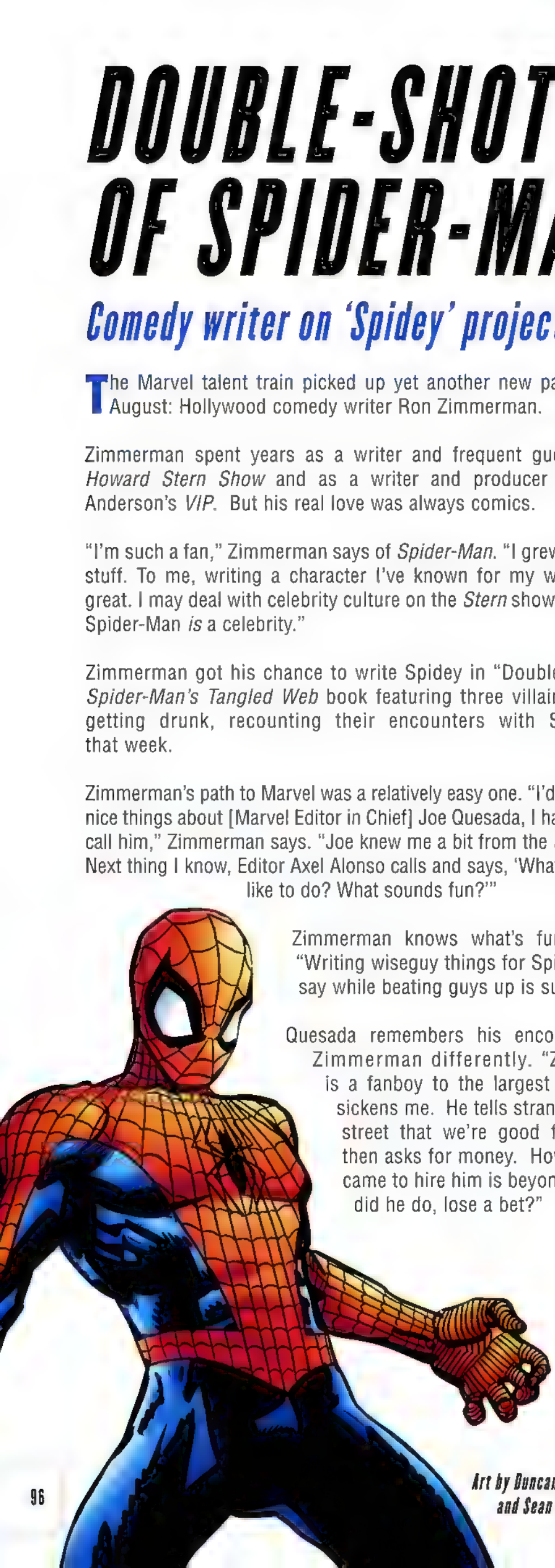
"I'm such a fan," Zimmerman says of *Spider-Man*. "I grew up on this stuff. To me, writing a character I've known for my whole life is great. I may deal with celebrity culture on the *Stern* show, but to me, Spider-Man *is* a celebrity."

Zimmerman got his chance to write Spidey in "Double Shots," a *Spider-Man's Tangled Web* book featuring three villains at a bar getting drunk, recounting their encounters with Spider-Man that week.

Zimmerman's path to Marvel was a relatively easy one. "I'd heard such nice things about [Marvel Editor in Chief] Joe Quesada, I had my agent call him," Zimmerman says. "Joe knew me a bit from the *Stern* show. Next thing I know, Editor Axel Alonso calls and says, 'What would you like to do? What sounds fun?'"

Zimmerman knows what's fun for him: "Writing wiseguy things for Spider-Man to say while beating guys up is such a kick!"

Quesada remembers his encounter with Zimmerman differently. "Zimmerman is a fanboy to the largest degree; he sickens me. He tells strangers on the street that we're good friends and then asks for money. How Axel ever came to hire him is beyond me; what did he do, lose a bet?"



Art by Duncan Fegredo (left) and Sean Phillips (right)

X-FORCE-FUL

The new 'X-Force' delivers on its promise

Writer Peter Milligan promised you'd never expect what was coming next in *X-Force*. He delivered on that promise.

In four short months, *X-Force* had become perhaps the most talked-about book in the business. The team had seen death, destruction, sexual innuendo, and even a "kidnapped child" storyline that was a send-up of the real-life Elian Gonzalez drama occurring at the time.

The death toll and rapid turnover rate among characters kept artist Mike Allred busy...and challenged. "I've got a love/hate relationship with that, because I'm creating characters like crazy and I don't want to shortchange any," he says. "But I know some of them might be feeding worms after two issues."

Be that as it may, there was *always* something major going on in *X-Force*. "It's a snowball constantly gathering size," says Editor Axel Alonso, who didn't initially like being assigned an *X-Men* book. "When I inherited this book I looked at as a chore. Now it's one of my favorite children."

Art by Mike Allred

September

TREND: No smoking

After 30 years, it was finally time for Wolverine and Nick Fury to butt out. In September 2001, a new rule went across the Marvel line: no smoking in the books. Even Wolverine, with his trademark stogie, would soon be tobacco-free. "It just seemed like the right thing to do," says Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. "Here we have Wolverine, who with the exception of Spider-Man, is the character most popular with kids. But we've got him smoking up a storm. No more."

Characters could still smoke in the adult-oriented MAX line, but the practice is discouraged. "I just felt like I was tired of promoting death," Quesada says. "I come from a long line of smokers. I've seen what it can do."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Richard Isanove

What the heck is "digital painting"? No one knew, or had even heard the term, until Richard Isanove came along. The acclaimed *Daredevil* colorist moved his palette over to *Origin* in September, and moved comic book coloring years ahead in the process.

To capture the turn-of-the-century feel of *Origin*, Marvel rolled the dice and took a chance on the art. It was decided Andy Kubert's lush pencils would not be inked, and Isanove would render the colors directly over Kubert's art. Isanove made frequent use of colored cross-hatching in the backgrounds, making the entire project look like an oil painting. It was the most ambitious computer-coloring job ever seen in comics, and Isanove nailed it. *Origin*'s story got readers in the door. The gorgeous art and unbelievable colors kept them there.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Dog

Origin promised a real and full name for Wolverine, known only as Logan for so many years. And lo and behold—right from the get-go, there was a Wolverine-looking boy with the family name Logan and the nickname of "Dog." Surely, this had to be Wolverine! As soon as his first name was revealed, the mystery would be solved!

Not so fast, Jack. Dog did an outstanding job of stringing readers along for two full issues before the never-saw-it-coming card of soft-spoken James Howlett as Wolverine was played. Marvel and Dog pulled the ultimate sleight-of-hand trick: readers were looking in one direction, while all along, the magic trick was happening somewhere else.

BY THE NUMBERS:

51 Marvel Comics published this month

26 Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"

44 Pages *Origin* went before it was revealed that Dog was *not* Wolverine

21 Days it took for the collected edition of J. Michael Straczynski's *Amazing Spider-Man* #30-#32 to sell out

8 Comic writers and artists in attendance when *Uncanny X-Men* writer Joe Casey's band, the Sellouts, played Los Angeles' world-famous Whiskey-A-Go-Go on Sunday, Sept. 9

Art by Joe Quesada and Richard Isanove

SIENKIEWICZ

DOES SHE OR DOESN'T SHE?

Under the table and under the skirt

Marvel's femme fatale assassin Elektra is mysterious in many ways. One way in particular.

"[Marvel President Bill Jemas] had this one secret that he did not want to divulge," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada says. "The secret was, 'Does she or doesn't she?' Wear panties, that is. Bill felt that perhaps she had more than one way of mesmerizing her opponents during battle."

Marvel artists were under strict instructions to never reveal what went under Elektra's...uh...flaps, and all went well until September's *Elektra* #3. Artist Chuck Austen drew a scene in which Elektra went *au natural*.

Problem was that Marvel, unsure of just where it was going in its switchover to the new, in-house ratings system, went a little too far. *Elektra* already comes with a "Violent Content" warning label. But in #3, Elektra put the "ass" in "assassin."

"It was a screw-up, pure and simple," Quesada says. "I could not put that book into the market in good conscience. Certain retailers would have had a lot of trouble with it."

But the book had already been printed when the scene was caught. It's a good thing that certain other retailers *wouldn't* have a problem with the book. While Quesada moved to shred the entire print run, estimated at 70,000 copies, and planned to print a new version, Bill Jemas intervened. "Bill said, 'Are you kidding? We're just gonna sell a couple as collector's items, five bucks apiece.' One phone call, and we made all our money back."

Jemas sold a few thousand copies to select retailers to make the money back to help pay for Marvel's new print run. The "nude" *Elektra* #3s are now collector's items commanding about $30 each on the open market. "The kicker to the story, which the public was not privy to until this moment," added Quesada, "is that this whole incident has poured a bucket of cold water over Bill's 'does she or doesn't she' fantasy. You see, Chuck had to go back and redraw that panel for the subsequent non-nudey print run and it is now obvious to all of us that, in fact, Elektra 'does'."

Art by Bill Sienkiewicz

THE ORIGIN OF ORIGIN

It's all about the Benjamins...

Marvel shocked the comic world in May with the announcement that they planned to do the unthinkable: the House of Ideas would publish a limited series called *Origin* to reveal the origin of Wolverine, a character whose mystery-shrouded past was as much a part of him as his razor-sharp claws.

These are the two events that prompted the decision to lift the veil from Wolvie's past:

The *X-Men 2* movie was going to concentrate heavily on Wolverine. "It occurred to us that if we didn't tell Wolverine's origin story, Hollywood was going to do it for us," says Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. Marvel decided to do the project, with no particular date attached. "We were actually stalling because we couldn't get a story that would do Wolverine justice," Quesada says.

All stalling stopped after the discovery of the second event: Marvel accountant Jim Finan stopped in to see Marvel President Bill Jemas. "One day, Jim comes walking into my office and says we're $800,000 short in our editorial budget," Jemas recalls. "To which I said, 'Well, where the hell is the Wolverine origin story?'"

Jemas got Quesada in motion immediately. "Joe went from desperate planning to absolute excitement in two seconds," Jemas says. "Rather than wait for the story to come to us, we immediately got in touch with the best and the brightest minds in the creative industry to do the project."

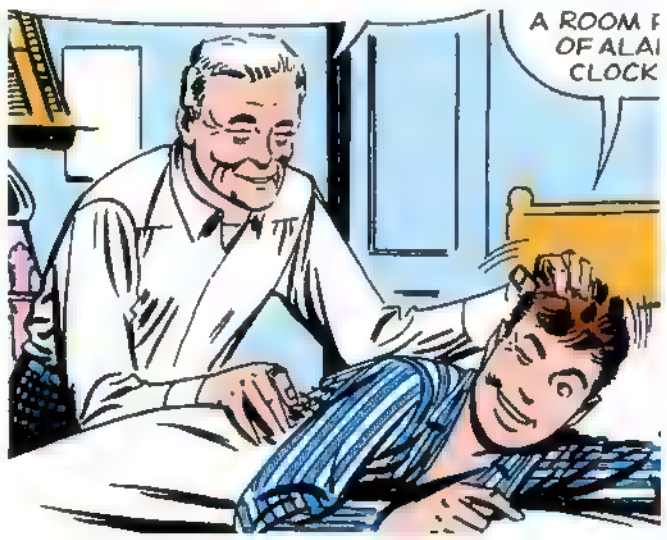
Art by Andy Kubert (above) Joe Quesada (right) and Richard Isanove

Art by Steve Sitko (right),
Joe Quesada and Richard Isanove (above)

'CAPTAIN LOKI' SAVES THE DAY!

Joe Quesada runs an 'Origin' misdirection play

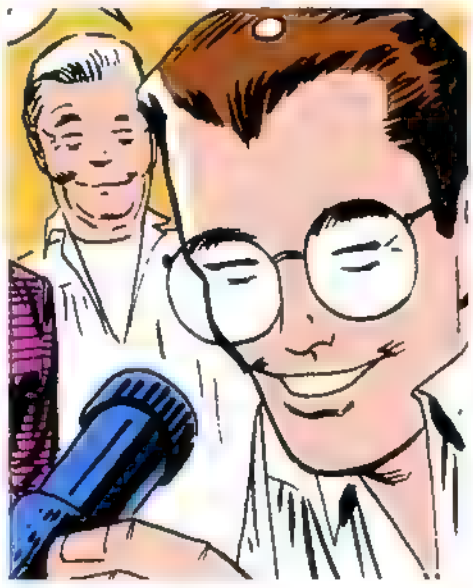
As happens so many times, someone talked. While Marvel was cooking up *Origin*, the long-awaited "origin of Wolverine", the press caught wind of the project and started sniffing around. In an effort to throw one particularly prickly thorn-in-the-side reporter off the trail of what was happening, Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada went to some incredible—and hilarious—extremes.



Quesada created a fake email address CaptianLoki@yahoo.com—and posed as a disgruntled Marvel staff member, all to float a fake cover story past Rich Johnston, a rumor-mongering pundit from an online comics news site.

Under the alias, Quesada began, "You and I have never spoken personally, though you have contacted me at odd times to confirm Marvel rumors." After requesting anonymity out of fear for his job, he continued, "There is a six-issue Spider-Man limited series on the horizon that has Peter Parker unable to shake a depression. He finds a shrink who specializes in regression therapy. Peter learns that he is a victim of horrific child abuse! Sexual abuse! I just don't see any reason to publish this story! We have to stop them from printing this!"

Johnston took the bait, saying that he'd run a story and disguise the identity of the mysterious "CaptainLoki." But he also needed to know why the Captain thought the story should be spiked. It was the opportunity Quesada needed to throw in his ultimate twist:



"He was abused by Uncle Ben! That's what has so many of us up in arms!" the good Captain relayed. "Quesada is willing to strip-mine the entire glorious past in order to get mainstream press, which he has been promised by *Time* magazine. He's a master spin doctor, but at what cost?"

Johnston floated the rumor and fans immediately expressed their outrage. Over the next week, rumors of *Origin* died down, replaced by the furor over Uncle Ben. It was then that "CaptainLoki" reported back to Johnston by secret e-mail, telling him the Spidey series had been scrapped. "Success!" he said. "Looks like *Time* magazine's people are furious that the news broke! Good work, Rich! With one small article, we were able to stop these mega-corporations from publishing this garbage!"

And thus, *Origin* continued to develop in secret, with none the wiser...

FINDING A STORYTELLER

Paul Jenkins gets the nod

Origin was ready to roll, with a bare-bones plot hammered out by Marvel President Bill Jemas and Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. Now they needed a scripter who could follow the road map,but still change lanes on his own.

"The problem is, it's hard being a creator and a business guy," Jemas says. "No one is going to sign up for *Origin* unless they can get their hand in it also. I can't just walk in and say, 'Hi, I'm the new president of the company. I'm giving you the story, now write it like I say.' You're never going to get good work out of people that way. So I had to treat *finding* a writer like a writer would treat making a pitch for a story to us."

The soft-sell "can you work in this framework" approach led to former *Sentry* writer Paul Jenkins. Jenkins took the basic concepts, and embellished them elaborately. "The problem with my original story was that it was too little," Jemas says. "I imagined three kids on a dirt playground in Texas in the summertime and that was that. But Joe had this *huge* vision for this spectacular Canadian estate, and then Paul came in with this whole socio-economic, up-the-hill, down-the-hill thing, and it all worked out well."

Origin got off to a flying start, but only after days of long meetings and much gnashing of teeth. "Those were some pretty intense meetings with Paul," Quesada remembers. "One, I think, went on for two days and ended with us, as Paul would say, 'killing his little darlings.' When he has a great story idea but finally has to cut it loose because it just doesn't work, it kills *him*. But, to Paul's credit, we worked it out and got it done. We all ended up killing each other's 'little darlings' to make it work. I guess the closest I can come to describing the *Origin* writing sessions would be to say it was like writing a screenplay with several writers on board. It was an amazing collaborative effort on all parts and I think it shows in the work!"

Art by Joe Quesada and Richard Isanove

THE ULTIMATE EVIL

How to make a badass truly badass

The evil of Dog was established in one harrowing scene in *Origin* #2. It was done the way Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada wanted to do it, not the way it might have been done at the old Marvel.

"We built up the appearance of this classic Marvel Evil Villain in another book earlier in the year," Quesada remembers. "We all knew the Evil Villain was coming for months and months and months. And then when the Evil Villain finally arrived, the writer gave us 16 *more* pages of flashbacks designed to show us just how evil this character was. My thing was...couldn't he have just killed a puppy?"

More than just being flippant, Joe was asking for the scene to be more immediate and powerful. Quesada and *Origin* writer Paul Jenkins had discussed pages and pages of evil acts for Dog to commit. But in the interest of moving the story along quickly, a streamlined version was decided on. And Quesada felt some regret after he saw Andy Kubert's powerful rendition of the scene.

"It was one of those things that had a completely different impact on me from when it was first scripted to when it was drawn," he says. "But now you know this kid is completely unredeemable. There's nothing worse than killing a puppy.

"I'll never forget me and Paul talking about this scene. We were in Orlando for MegaCon 2001. It was early morning and Paul stopped by my room to have breakfast and plot out *Origin* scenes. When I suggested the puppy killing scene Paul could barely write the words down. Like me, he's an animal lover, but this was one step further. He couldn't even write it without getting weepy. Needless to say this became a wonderful point of ridicule! Nothing like teasing big ol' soccer-playing, tough guy Jenkins about crying while writing 'And Dawg slits James's puppy's throat!' I encourage all fans to bring it up to him during convention season!"

Art by Andy Kubert and Richard Isanove

LO, THERE SHALL COME...A HOWLETT!

The ironic truth about Wolverine's name

Wolverine had long been a man with one name: Logan. Whether a first name or last, no one knew. But *Origin* promised a name to the character...a name that wasn't easy to choose.

"The search literally went on until the last week before the book had to ship," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada remembers. "And we couldn't find a last name." Inspiration came from an unlikely source—Quesada's wife, Nanci.

Nanci Quesada's mother was adopted, and she never knew her birth parents. In an effort to track down the family's medical history, Nanci and Joe sought out her maternal grandmother. After a lengthy search, a family name was found—Howlett.

"So I just put it on this huge list of potential names," Quesada says. "I didn't tell anyone this was Nanci's family name, because I thought someone might feel sorry for me and want to make that Wolverine's name."

Finally, with deadlines looming, a choice had to be made. Marvel President Bill Jemas hadn't seen the proposed list yet, so he could provide a fresh perspective. "So we were like, let's give it to Bill," Quesada says. "He'll eat anything."

Jemas looked through the massive list, and had only one comment to make: "Well. 'Howlett.' That's really clever. 'Howlett,' kind of like a wolf's 'howl.' That's the name."

"And I was like, 'You have to be kidding!'" says Quesada.

The list of names:

Manchester	Boddinham	Lockton
Howlett	Blakewell	Caxaton
Windsor	Digby	Carfax
Covington	Dixton	Rykeworth
Shermann	Fenton	Woode
Mansfield	Wynston	Windham
Collingsworth	Langeton	Knighton
Hollingsworth	Sackville	Whitewood
Hawkins	Carlyll	Ratcliff
LaMont	Carlysle	Ramsey
Garret	Castletown	Weston
Sencler	Chamburleyn	
Underhill	Sampson	

"THAT THERE BUILDING IS THE HOWLETT ESTATE.
"THEY SAY IT WAS BUILT ON A FOUNDATION OF TEARS."
Art by Andy Kubert and Richard Isanove

THE TIE-BREAKER

Ralph Macchio sets the story pace

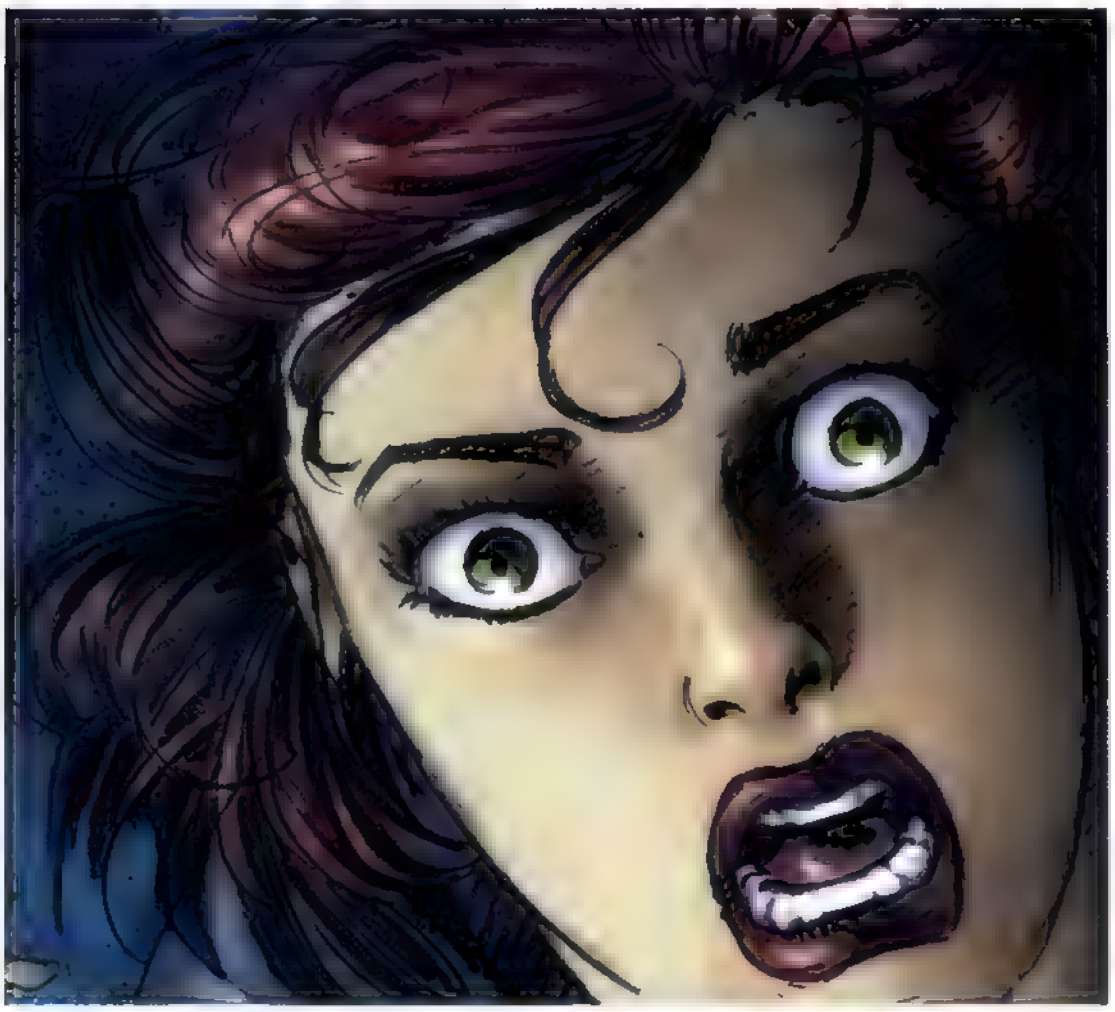
One of the greatest misdirection plays in comics played out at the end of *Origin* #2. For two full issues, readers were led to believe that the savage character Dog was Wolverine. But in an amazing twist no one saw coming, soft-spoken James Howlett was the real Wolverine. The only question was when to spring the surprise.

Marvel President Bill Jemas, Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada, writer Paul Jenkins, *Wizard Magazine* writer Chris Lawrence, and Marvel editors Pete Franco and Mark Powers were deadlocked—half the group wanted to spring the surprise at the end of #2. The other half wanted #3. And no one would give in.

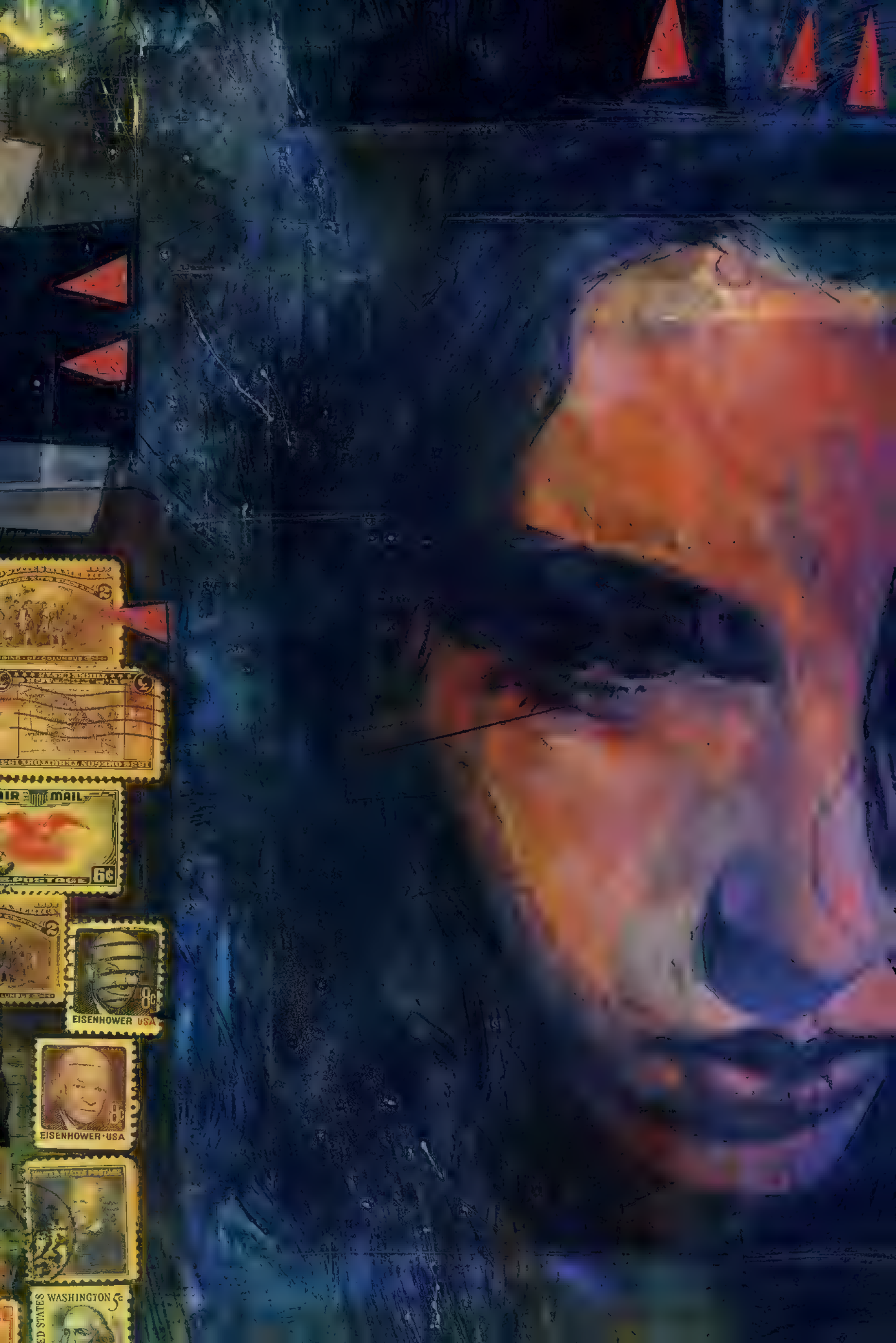
"Since none of us would budge, I had Ralph Macchio cast the deciding vote," Quesada remembers. Macchio is a 26-year Marvel editorial vet, and, according to Quesada, "the person with the absolute best story instincts in the company. Ralph can read a story cold and tell you what's wrong with it, right off the top of his head."

So Quesada explained the problem to Macchio verbally. "Without missing a beat, Ralph said, 'By the time you get to issue #3, the fans will be frustrated if this isn't resolved.'" Macchio remembered the story *almost* exactly the same way, except for his one lost comment: "This isn't going to be held against me, is it?"

Too late, Ralph. The decision was made, and the revelation happened in *Origin* #2. "Look, as far as I'm concerned, it was successful and it worked," Quesada says. "I'd do the same thing again today."



Art by Andy Kubert and Richard Isanove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INK ON PAPER

'Alias' has a hard time getting printed

Alias #1 was all set to kick off Marvel's mature-readers line, under the MAX imprint. But, at the last minute, there was one small snag. There was a problem with getting it printed.

"Our printer in Alabama saw the content of *Alias* and, as is their right, they didn't feel comfortable printing it. As a matter of fact, they *refused* to print it," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada recalls. Fortunately, Marvel was able to line up another printer in short order, and *Alias* #1 hits stands without delay. So what caused the fuss? *Alias* did contain a fair smattering of four-letter words and one sex scene, but to this day, no one knows for sure.

"We hadn't run into this problem because Marvel hadn't done mature books in over 15 years," Quesada says. "But the printer wasn't specific. I mean, there were a lot of rumors out there, but I think all that stuff was just junk. The printer would only say they had an issue with the 'content.' They didn't say anything else."

Art by David Mack (left) and Michael Gaydos (above)

THE REVELATION

Spider-Man does what a teenager would do

It wasn't the Coming of Galactus. It wasn't the Kree-Skrull War or the Death of Gwen Stacy. But to writer Brian Michael Bendis, it was the most significant moment he had ever written in comics.

Ultimate Spider-Man #13 was a comic about a conversation. Sound exciting? What if, in that conversation, Peter Parker revealed to almost-girlfriend Mary Jane Watson that he was Spider-Man? "I put myself in the shoes of this 15-year-old kid, and I decided that if I was 15 and had these powers, I'd use them to do what all teenagers want to do—impress girls," Bendis says.

Marvel kept a tight lock on the secret of the revelation until the day the book hit stands, and the charming, wistful issue was an instant hit, selling out and becoming an overnight collector's item.

Marvel President Bill Jemas thinks it's Bendis's ear for realistic teen dialogue that won over the masses. "We asked Brian for the plot, and he said, 'I can't do it today. I'm going out to the mall. I gotta hear how kids talk, how *he'd* say this.' So he went to malls and playgrounds and schools, and spent the whole weekend doing that. Then he went back to his house and typed up this spectacular issue."

A content Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada added, "It's a good thing we didn't ask him to write Prince Namor in this issue; Brian might have drowned."

October

TREND: *Just good comics*

It had been a year since the "September Revolution" started. Marvel President Bill Jemas felt that Marvel had come full circle and was finally in a position of strength.

"This is a great month in terms of just good comics," he says. "What's happening now is that we're not really being driven by number one launches or events. These are just solid issues, not because each is a number one, but because we have another good *Alias*, another good *Ultimate X-Men*."

Marvel was even able to change on the fly and keep the good times rolling. "It's funny," he remarks. "*Daredevil* was a showcase title when we had Kevin Smith, Joe Quesada, and David Mack on it. Now this month, we're able to bring in Brian Michael Bendis and keep it a showcase title."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: *Alex Ross*

No one puts butts in the seats like Alex Ross. The painter found fame at Marvel in 1993 with *Marvels*, a first-person perspective and "ground floor" look at the early days of the Marvel Universe. Ross's lush, ultra-realistic paintings made superheroes come to life, as if they stepped out of the real world and onto the page. Any project by Alex Ross became not just a comic book, but an event.

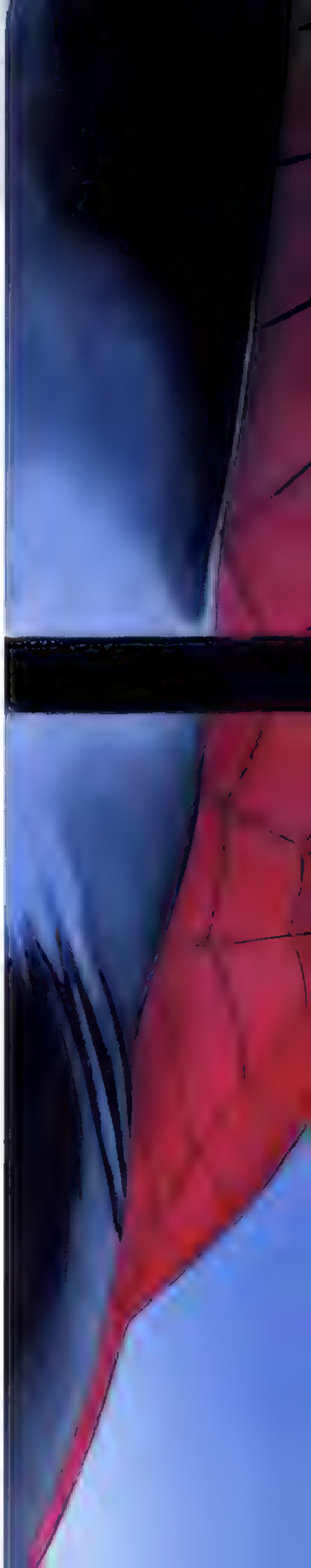
Ross imagined a new Marvel Universe in *Earth X*, a 1999 limited series in which he and collaborator Jim Krueger projected Marvel characters into the future and set their actions around a single tragic event. *Earth X* begat the sequel *Universe X*, which led to October's release of *Heralds*. Once again, Ross and Krueger went into the future, with Ross's imaginative designs and stunning painted covers making for another hit series.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: *Daredevil*

The Man Without Fear got a change in direction in October with the arrival of new writer Brian Michael Bendis, accompanied by artist Alex Maleev. *Daredevil* took a chapter from its storied past and focused once again on organized crime, in a take many readers found reminiscent of "The Godfather." Bendis's heavy background in crime fiction and the addition of the gritty, street-level visuals of new artist Alex Maleev gave the book a realism and believability rarely seen in comics. No matter the creative team, Daredevil remained a hit character.

BY THE NUMBERS:

48	Marvel Comics published this month
27	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
27	Number of flashbulbs shown popping on the cover of October's *X-Force* #121
100,000	Copies in Marvel's first printing of the *Heroes* benefit book supporting terrorist attack relief
150,000	Copies in the second printing of Marvel's *Heroes*



Art by Alex Ross

1653

MARVEL'S REAL HEROES

Artists and writers pitch in for 'Heroes'

"We all know what happened September 11," Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada says. Indeed. But what wasn't known at the time was how quickly—or how generously—the comic community could respond.

One week after the September 11 terrorist attacks struck New York and Washington, D.C., Marvel Comics announced *Heroes*, a benefit poster book by a bevy of creators with proceeds going to the Twin Towers Fund. The announcement was made September 14. Less than a month later, on October 17, *Heroes* was on stands.

Some Marvel character pinups were included in *Heroes*, but most of the pages had imagery of police and firefighters doing their jobs in the wake of the recent destruction. For everyone involved, the work was incredibly personal. "It's the world's greatest superhero creators paying tribute to the world's greatest real heroes," Quesada says. And this confluence of creators brought about a few surprises.

In something of a strange homecoming, former *Spider-Man* artist Todd McFarlane contributed his first Marvel work since 1992, collaborating with Joe Quesada, with whom he had been verbally sparring just a few months earlier (see March, 2001). "I told Todd about this book and asked if he'd like to contribute," Quesada says. "He said he could probably ink something, and I asked, 'How'd you like to ink my piece?'"

McFarlane graciously agreed. "Todd and I worked up a piece together as a show of solidarity," Quesada says. It wasn't about comics or fighting. It was about doing all that you could to help. And, 1.2 million dollars later, Marvel did as much as it could.

Art by Adam Kubert, Richard Isanove (above), Joe Quesada and Alex Ross (left)

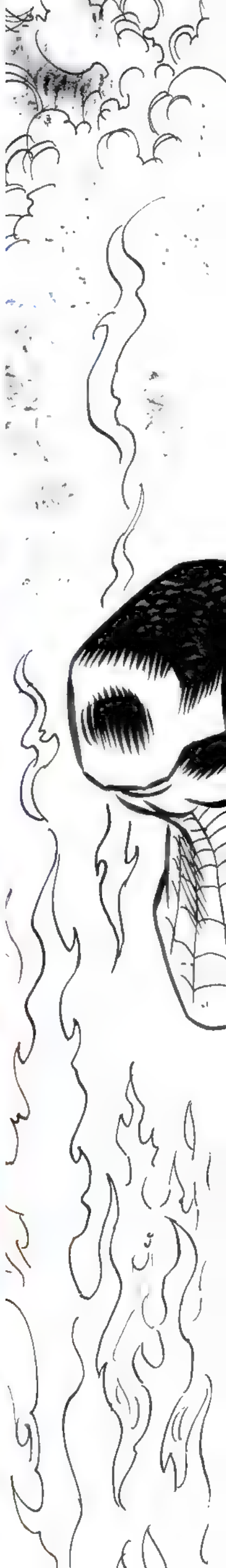
HEROES *HELPS OUT*

Over $1.2 million is a good start

Spurred on by massive media coverage, Marvel Comics' *Heroes*, the poster book benefiting victims of September 11's terrorist attacks, sold out immediately, and Marvel announced a second printing to satisfy demand.

In all, *Heroes* sold over 300,000 copies. Including its auction of original art and the sales of an autographed edition sold by comic merchandiser Dynamic Forces, Marvel raised over $1.2 million for the Twin Towers Fund.

Heroes, which was assembled in approximately three weeks and contained work from over 100 contributors, would go on to sell through three printings in all, with all proceeds donated to the Twin Towers Fund.



Art by John Romite Sr. and Jr. (right), Mike Deodato Jr. and Dennis Calero (above)

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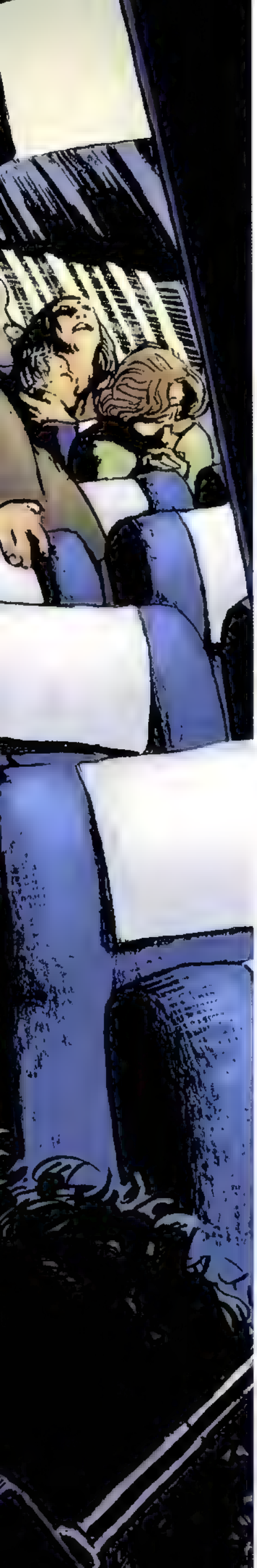


SPREADING THE HEROES WORD

Marvel goes far and wide

"If you build it, they will come." A great line for a novel or from a movie, perhaps, but it's not too workable in the real world.

Within the first few days of the events of September 11, *Heroes* was well underway, but the public had to know about it if funds were to be raised. So Marvel and, specifically Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada, hit the publicity trail, spreading the good word. *Heroes* got write-ups in hundreds of magazine and newspapers, and Quesada made appearances on CNN, MTV News, Fox News Channel, and NBC's *Today* show, to name but a few.

Marvel artist Adam Kubert was there for the *Today* show on October 17…where he suffered a fair amount of stage fright. "I had an out-of-body experience," Kubert says. "The lights went on, I looked at Al Roker, he asked a question, and I swear I didn't hear a word. I looked at Joe, he must have been answering the question, but I still didn't hear anything."

Fortunately, Kubert overcame his fear. "I warmed up after a minute," he says. "Thank God, Al Roker was really a comic fan, and knew what he was talking about."

Kubert got through the show, and was fine until he started to leave. "It was only afterward they told me there were 5 million people watching," he says. "I got scared all over again."

Igor Kordey and Chris Chuckry (left) and Joe Kubert (above)

HEROES
HAMMER FALLS

Artists raise another $60,000

They had already given. Then they gave again. The high-profile artists who contributed work to *Heroes*, Marvel Comics' tribute book benefiting the Twin Towers Fund in the wake of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, graciously contributed their original art, as well. The pieces were auctioned off by movie writer/director Kevin Smith during an auction at Manhattan's Club 101 in January. In all, over $60,000 was raised.

The artists	*Amount*
Neal Adams	$4,600
J. Scott Campbell	$800
Richard Corben	$800
Mike Deodato	$4,000
Gene Ha	$800
Sam Kieth	$6,000
Adam Kubert	$900
Joe Kubert	$1,350
Jim Lee	$2,000
Jae Lee & Neil Gaiman	$900
Frank Miller	$6,500
Alan Moore & Dave Gibbons	$1,600
Tom Palmer	$3,000
George Pérez	$1,500
Joe Quesada & Todd McFarlane	$7,000
John Romita Sr. & Jr.	$5,000
Alex Ross	$10,000
Steve Rude	$3,000
Bill Sienkiewicz	$3,500
Brian Stelfreeze	$3,500
Total:	***$66,750***

Art by Sam Kieth (left) and Alex Ross (right)

HELL COMES TO HELL'S KITCHEN

'Daredevil' gets down and dirty

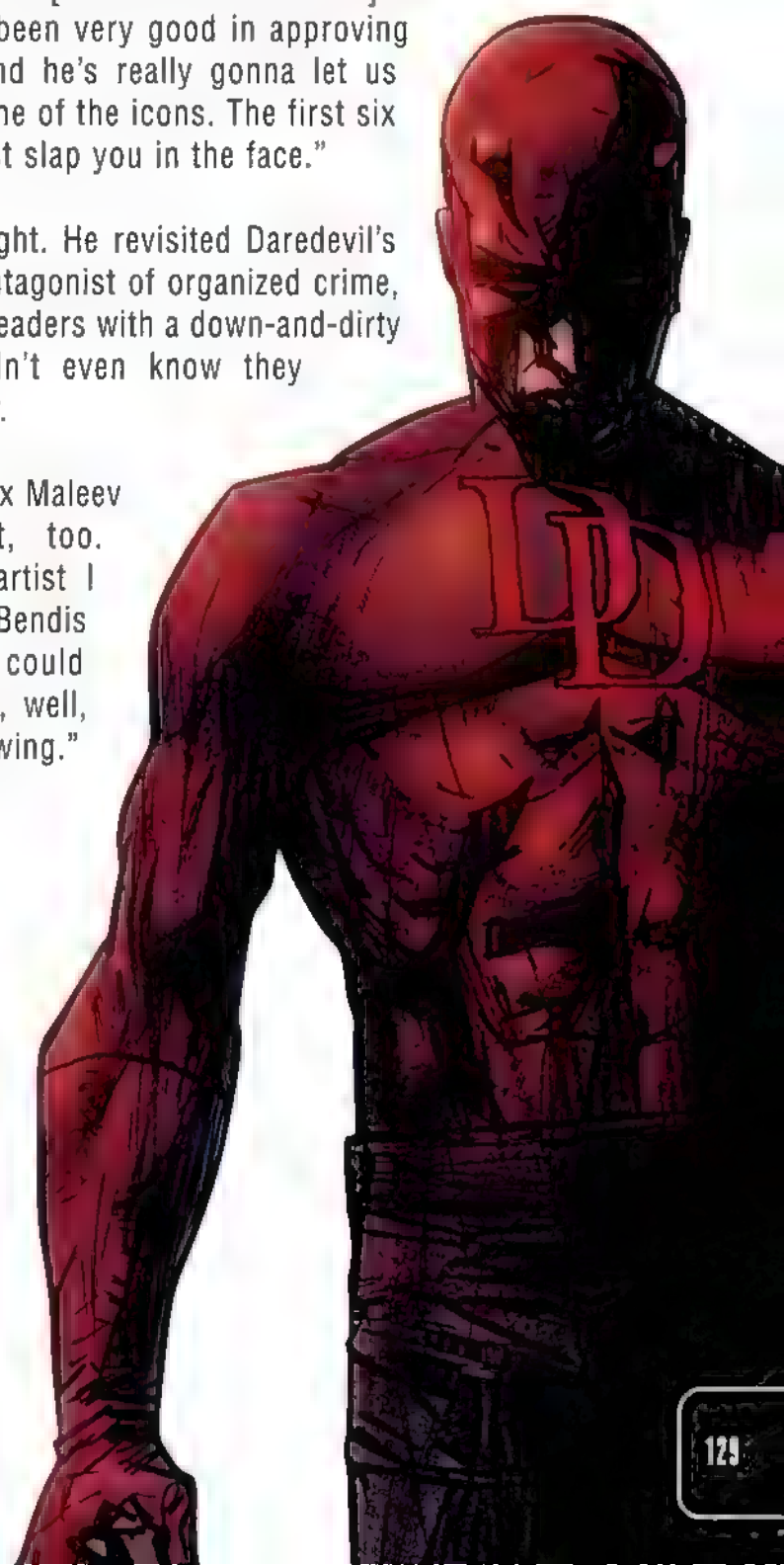
Daredevil, the protector of Hell's Kitchen, went back to the gutters again in October.

Crime fiction writer Brian Michael Bendis and gritty artist Alex Maleev entered as the title's new creative team with #26.

"I can't believe how many ideas I have for *Daredevil*," Bendis said at the time. "[Marvel Editor in Chief] Joe Quesada has been very good in approving everything, and he's really gonna let us carve into some of the icons. The first six issues will just slap you in the face."

Bendis was right. He revisited Daredevil's roots as an antagonist of organized crime, and shocked readers with a down-and-dirty take they didn't even know they were ready for.

Or course, Alex Maleev did his part, too. "Alex is the artist I wish I was," Bendis says. "If I could draw like him, well, I'd still be drawing."



Art by Alex Maleev

THE ULTIMATE JOKE

Alternative cartoonist Jim Mahfood crashes at the House

An artist with credits such as *Cosmic Toast* and *Grrl Scouts* under his belt drawing the most venerable and beloved Marvel characters? Spider-Man? The Fantastic Four, fer cryin' out loud? Only at the New Marvel.

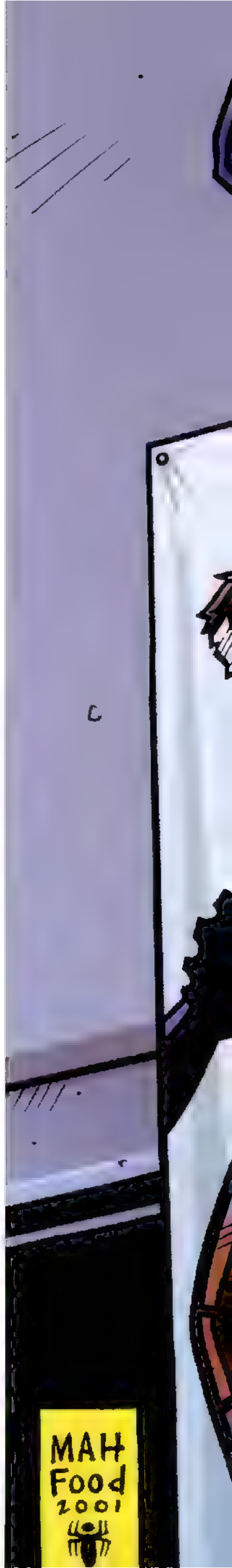
Cartoonist Jim Mahfood was recruited by *Ultimate Marvel Team-Up* writer Brian Michael Bendis to do an issue of the hit title. Even for a title already famed for its edgy creative roster, including creators like Matt Wagner (*Grendel*) and John Totleben (AOL Comics's *Swamp Thing*), Mahfood was a surprise. "We started by wanting to team Spider-Man up with Ghost Rider or another 'B' character," Mahfood recalls. "But Bendis called me and said he had talked to [Marvel Editor in Chief] Joe Quesada, who said, 'You should do the Fantastic Four.'"

The notion quite literally scared Mahfood. "This is high-profile, classic, mainstream Marvel!" he exclaims. But Bendis found a way to do the story in a manner that suited Mahfood's unique sensibilities.

"Brian said we could do an all-comedy issue where Spider-Man sets all these Skrulls loose in Manhattan, and they even fight right through the Marvel office building," Mahfood says. "When he explained it that way, I guess it made more sense why I'd be doing it."

It made sense to readers, too. The quirky change of pace was a hit with fans. "As soon as I got the script, I knew it was all going to be okay," Mahfood says.

Art by Jim Mahfood



RAGE ON THE PAGE

Marvel keeps it real

September 11 was still very fresh in everyone's memory when a black-and-white proof of page 12 of *Cable* #98 crossed Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada's desk. "That panel bothered me because it reflected the nightmare of everyone in the United States at the time," Quesada says. "It depicted terrorists."

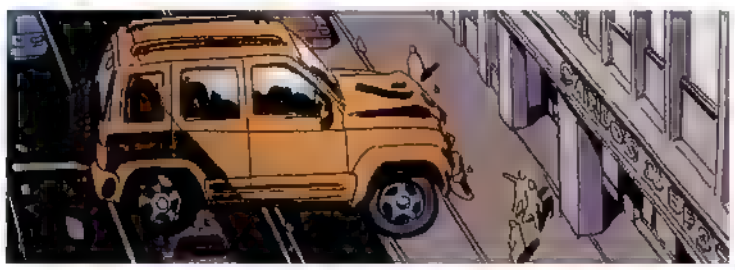
Beginning just one month ago, with issue #97, *Cable* had taken a sharp turn toward reality with the new creative team of writer David Tischman and artist Igor Kordey. Now, that reality featured a grinning terrorist crashing a car bomb through an office window in Peru. The scene had been plotted and even drawn months before September 11's events, and the book was due to go to press that very week. But still...

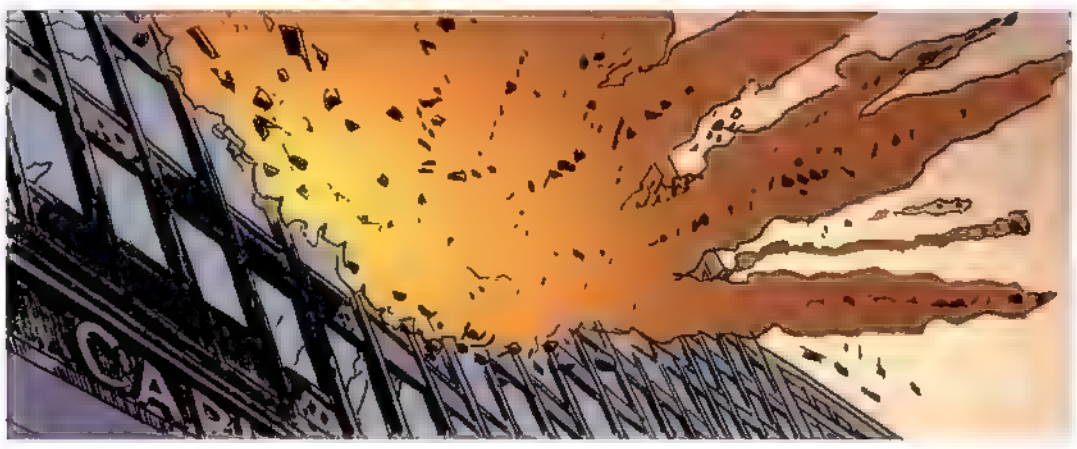
Nevertheless, Quesada called Igor Kordey to have him change the scene. To Quesada's surprise, Kordey disagreed. The 44-year-old artist had seen the horrors of war first-hand as a soldier in the Croatian army a decade earlier. Kordey fought now just as he fought then to keep the scene intact.

"His argument to me was, 'Joe, if you start brushing stuff under the carpet, you're actually doing yourself a disservice. You only learn to deal with trauma by confronting your feelings about the trauma. If you ignore it, it doesn't go away. It just gets worse, and it'll come out as aggression.'"

Kordey drew a parallel to child abuse. He viewed child abuse in North America as a silent crime, unspeakable. That only led to a system in which the abused later become the abusers, and the entire cycle repeats itself.

"That really solidified in my mind exactly what Marvel's approach should be," Quesada says. "We're not gonna shred books and change pages just because something might be upsetting. We're *not* going to shy away from that sort of thing." The scene, as you might imagine, stayed.





Art by Igor Kordey

November

TREND: Paperbacks

Marvel President Bill Jemas promised it a year earlier, and after the necessary ramp-up, it was reality. "We're now in the world of trade paperbacks," he said. "We're going to start telling stories that fit into the collected edition form at Marvel. This is not going to be the exception; it's going to be the norm."

By November 2001, it *was* the norm, with Marvel regularly cranking out a dozen new comic collections a month. But some changes had to be made. "No constant flashbacks, no being wrapped up in our whole history, and it's not necessary to have a big fight by page 4 of every issue anymore," Jemas says. "[Marvel Editor in Chief] Joe Quesada's main mission has been to very meticulously develop stories that make for a great paperback."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Bruce Jones

He came from nowhere and made people care. Bill Bixby as Bruce Banner? Maybe. But that same description could also be used to describe Bruce Jones.

The onetime (15 years ago) Marvel writer suddenly appeared out of nowhere in November to lead a revamp of *Incredible Hulk*. Jones put alter ego Bruce Banner on the road and on the run in a take reminiscent of the old *Incredible Hulk* TV show—and people suddenly cared.

Jones' *Incredible Hulk* #34 sold out instantly, and after #35 did the same, Marvel announced a reprint collection of #34 through #36—before #36 even hit stands. The Hulk was once again one of the hottest characters in comics with sales rising each month, and it was Bruce Jones who had put him in that position.

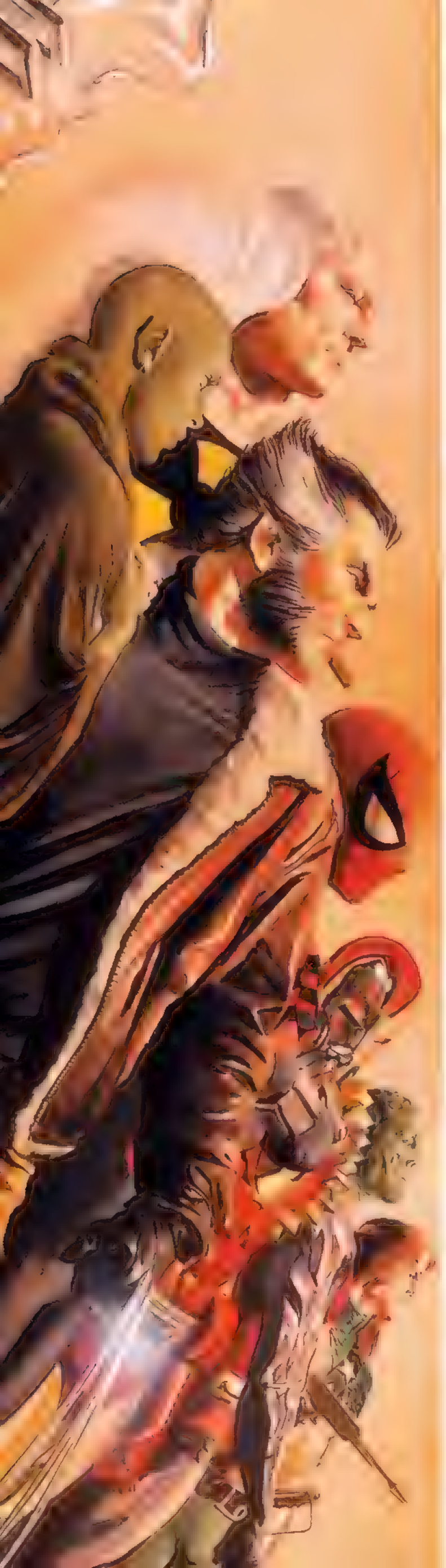
MOST VALUABLE CHARACTERS: Elektra & War Machine

"Why two guys?" you ask? Because of the ultimate utility infielder and do-everything guy for Marvel, writer/artist Chuck Austen!

After a long layoff from comics spent working in the animation field, Austen splashed back on the scene big time in 2001. By December, he was drawing *Elektra* every month, writing a story arc on *Ultimate X-Men*, and he had just finished writing and drawing the 12-issue *U.S. War Machine* series. No matter the job, no matter the timing, Chuck Austen was there to fill any and every role for Marvel.

BY THE NUMBERS:

38	Marvel Comics published this month
24	Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"
14	Number of new paperback and hardcover collections published by Marvel in November
4	Months in a row *Origin* remained the top-selling book in the comic industry, encompassing *Origin* #1-#4
26	Number of years Ralph Macchio had worked as a Marvel editor as of November 2001



WELCOME TO PARADISE

Alex Ross 'Heralds' his next series

Alex Ross took a small pit stop along the way of his futuristic X trilogy. While *Earth X* led to *Universe X*, which was to lead to *Paradise X*, Ross decided to stop at the "prequel" limited series *Heralds*. More importantly, if you're Alex Ross, you get around the "no group grope" cover rule at Marvel.

"Alex will do group shots when he wants to, because he's so damn respected," says Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. "Single character, multi-character, it's all very successful. He's in a league of his own."

Maybe Marvel President Bill Jemas put it more succinctly: "Beautiful covers. Great covers," he says.

Art by Alex Ross

THE CURIOUS CASE OF SPIDER-GIRL

Can one-year-olds write letters?

Art by Udon Studios

Spider-Girl almost died in May. Marvel's ongoing tale of May Parker, the daughter of Spider-Man, was in a tough situation. But in true super hero fashion, she was saved at the last moment...by an unlikely ally.

"The problem was, sales were declining and the bean counters projected that by late fall, the book would be losing money," Joe Quesada remembers. Marvel quietly announced that the title would be canceled after October's issue #39. That's when one young girl (or so Marvel thought) swung to the rescue.

"We decided to save *Spider-Girl* because Bill got this touching letter from this little 8-year-old girl, Brianna," Quesada says. "She said, 'Dear Mr. Jemas, please save *Spider-Girl*. It's the only book I read. May Parker is just like a girl I know in my math class.' She spoke of Spider-Girl as one of her best friends. It melted Bill's charcoal heart."

Young Miss magazine got wind of the letter and wanted to run an article on Brianna's crusade. After using Marvel's public relations firm to track down the girl, the magazine made the call. Marvel Editor Jenny Lee recalls that the conversation didn't exactly go the way they thought it would.

"*YM* called, and Brianna's mother answered," Lee says. "They asked, 'Can I speak to little Brianna?' and she was like, 'Well, no, I don't think so. She's only one year old.'"

Turns out the letter was from Brianna's dad. ""He was a big fan of the book, and didn't want it to be canceled, so he wrote it using his daughter's name, and 'aged' her to 8 years old," Quesada laughs.

That ain't all he did. "The letter was so carefully crafted," Lee remembers. "It had little typos in it. She even went on to say, 'Me and my dad read this together and we really bond.' His wife had no idea he had done any of this until *YM* called."

Even though Marvel had been "stung," they saved the book, as many other fans since had also rallied behind the title. "It didn't matter," Quesada says. "Bill's heart had already melted. And I happened to like the book, too."

But the whole episode came with a definite cost. "It cost us a major article in *YM*!" Quesada exclaimed. "They were gonna do a whole big thing on *Spider-Girl*! So Brianna's father screwed up. But we'll forgive him."

OVERNIGHT DECISION

J. Michael Straczynski turns a change of heart into a touching story

Writer J. Michael Straczynski used November's *Amazing Spider-Man* #36 to show Spider-Man's reactions to the events of September 11, 2001. It was the only book to use Marvel characters in that context.

"Since the Marvel Universe uses the real world as a canvas on which to draw its characters' lives, we always thought there was a responsibility to have our books echo the real world," says Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada. As such, Quesada and *Amazing* Editor Axel Alonso asked Straczynski to do a "World Trade Center" issue. And Straczynski declined.

"Basically, Joe Straczynski just came to the conclusion that he couldn't do it," Quesada remembers. "It was too big a story. Specifically, he said, 'There are no words to cover that big of a story.'"

Fortunately, and for reasons no one knows, Straczynski had a sudden change of heart... overnight. "The next day, we had a full 22-page comic script on Axel's computer," Quesada says. "It turned out, of course, to be one of our most popular and important issues of the year."

Amazing Spider-Man sold out immediately and started an avalanche of media coverage. Spider-Man was again a trailblazer for Marvel, and, more importantly, he was part of stories that impacted the world around him as comics had rarely done before.

Art by John Romita Jr. and Scott Hanna

RETURN

GOOD ART CAN'T WAIT

Shaking the last of Old Marvel

Incredible Hulk Editor Axel Alonso actually sat on this stunning piece of art that was based on an earlier Jim Steranko piece for months before showing it to anyone. As soon as Marvel President Bill Jemas saw the drawing, it was immediately used for promotion...over Axel's protests.

"Bill, it doesn't come out for months yet." Alonso protested. But that was the point. As Jemas told him, in the NBA, you promote the stars every night. And in the new Marvel, good art can't wait.

Art by Kaare Andrews (right) and John Romita Jr. and Tom Palmer (above)

EAST MEETS WEST

Yoshitaka Amano and Greg Rucka unite for a unique project

Language barrier? No barrier at all. Not for Marvel Editor Jenny Lee, who brought together two of comics' most interesting and unique creators for a fascinating project. In November, crime novelist Greg Rucka and legendary Japanese artist Yoshitaka Amano teamed up to produce *Elektra & Wolverine: The Redeemer*.

Lee had worked with Amano previously, during her tenure at Vertigo/AOL Comics, on a *Sandman: The Dream Hunters* graphic novel. She wanted to bring him into Marvel, and found the perfect collaborator in Rucka.

The three-issue limited series wasn't a traditional pictures-and-word-balloons comic. Rather, it was straight prose by Rucka with spot illustrations by Amano. Despite the fact that Rucka and Amano never spoke or even met (all their work was done via translators), the creators meshed beautifully. Rucka was well versed at writing prose, and Amano's lush style lent itself well to gorgeous, full-page illustrations. *Elektra & Wolverine: The Redeemer* was both a critical and commercial success, as well as another sign that Marvel was committed to taking chances and knocking the ball out of the park.

Art by Yoshitaka Amano

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MUTANT POTPOURRI

A smorgasbord of artists on 'Uncanny X-Men' #400

Make no mistake: *Uncanny X-Men* #400 was not your typical Marvel anniversary blowout of yesteryear.

"It was really the artist line-up that made this issue special," says writer Joe Casey. "Sean Phillips, Javier Pulido, Cully Hamner, Ashley Wood, Eddie Campbell...does that sound like a traditional anniversary issue? Hell no."

Casey helped put together that lineup of largely art-house artists, and wrote each section specifically for each contributor, trying to play to their individual strengths. "When the book was all put together, I was pretty proud of what we'd accomplished," Casey remarks. "It was like an 'alternative comix' version of one of the most mainstream properties in comics."

Some fans liked it. Others? "Typically, the hardcore *X-Men* fans hated it," Casey laughs. "And I knew they would. But I also knew that some of them, whether they knew it or not, would someday appreciate what we'd done. We'd exposed them to several styles of artwork that were decidedly different than what they were probably used to. Right now, the book is still seen as an anomaly.. But I believe that quality wins out, and I think fandom will someday look back on *Uncanny X-Men* #400 and see it for what it really is—artistically bold and groundbreaking."

One fan loved it—Eddie Campbell's son. Casey met Campbell at the ComiCon International: San Diego, when Campbell had his young son in tow. "Eddie told me, 'My son thinks I'm cool now, since I'm getting to draw *X-Men*,'" Casey laughs. "I wanted to tell his son, 'Don't you know who your father is?! Forget *X-Men*! Your dad drew *From Hell*!'"

Art by Ashley Wood (left) and Sean Phillips (right)

December

TREND: Jabbing a finger in your eye

Whether it was "bad girls for fanboys," Marvel orders as a retailer I.Q. test, or constant references to DC as "AOL Comics," Marvel President Bill Jemas and Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada proved themselves to be loud, rambunctious, and—some would say—downright nasty in 2001

"I hated this nice, friendly relationship that developed with our main competitor," Quesada says. "There's a reason they're called your 'competitor.' I love the fact that fans are split between Marvel and DC, 'cause that means there's a pulse That means people care enough to make a choice. It's like if you're a baseball fan and you don't have a team you root for, well...then you're not a fan."

The constant needling was a very conscious choice. "I wanted to get back to the attitude where Marvel was a really feisty company," Quesada says. "If that means I needle DC to get our energy up, then I'll needle them 'til the cows come home."

MOST VALUABLE PLAYER: Chris Claremont

The *X-Men* canon was firing in December! Chris Claremont, the Man on the *X-Men* franchise for nearly three decades, who was responsible for the creation of so much in the *X-Men* canon of titles, proved he was still the best-selling author in comics by outperforming a little thing called *Dark Knight II*. With his cumulative sales on *X-treme X-Men*, *X-treme X-Men 2001* and *X-treme X-men: Savage Land*, Claremont's volume and dollars outperformed the legendary Frank Miller's first issue for AOL Comics. And Chris didn't even need a new #1. He just did it the Marvel way—by making comics people wanted to read.

MOST VALUABLE CHARACTER: Nick Fury

There was no rest for the wicked, as the ol' warhorse soldier-turned-spy Nick Fury had to pull double-duty for Marvel. A crusty, traditional Nick Fury, agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. was starring in his own MAX *Fury* mini-series, while the Ultimate Nick Fury was wowing audiences in *Ultimate X-Men* as a hyped-up super-spy best described as "James Bond times 1000." No matter the version, fans loved seeing Fury and his take-no-prisoners attitude. He quickly came out of the mists of obscurity to become one of Marvel's hottest and most popular characters once again.

BY THE NUMBERS:

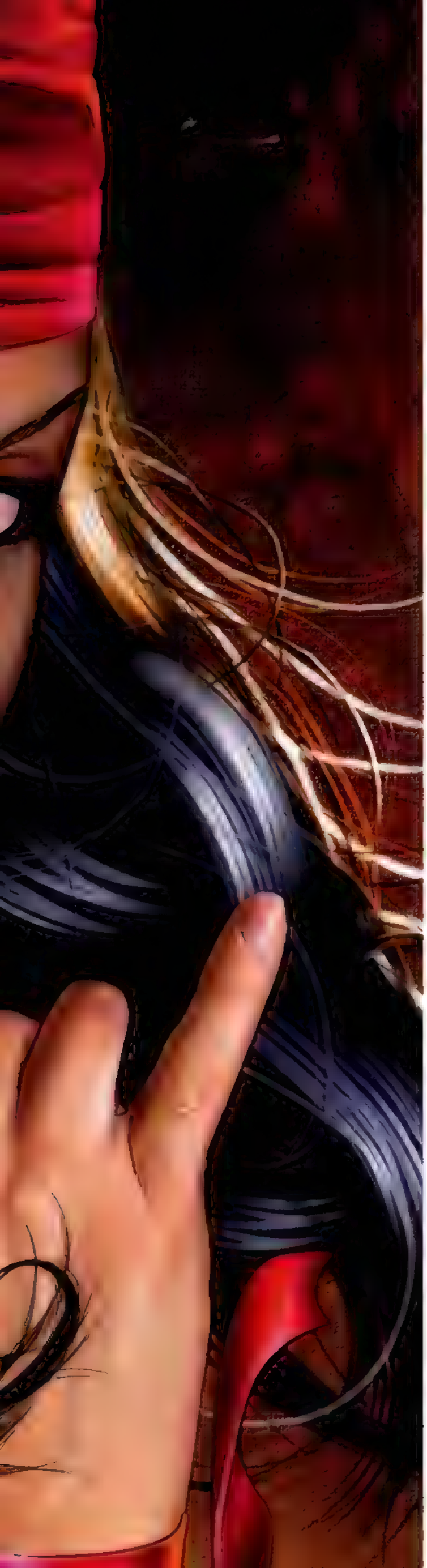
48 Marvel Comics published this month

29 Marvel Comics Bill and Joe actually thought were "good"

25 "'Nuff Said" books this month

21 Days between November's final issue of *U.S. War Machine* #12, and December's *U.S. War Machine* trade paperback

Art by Bill Sienkiewicz

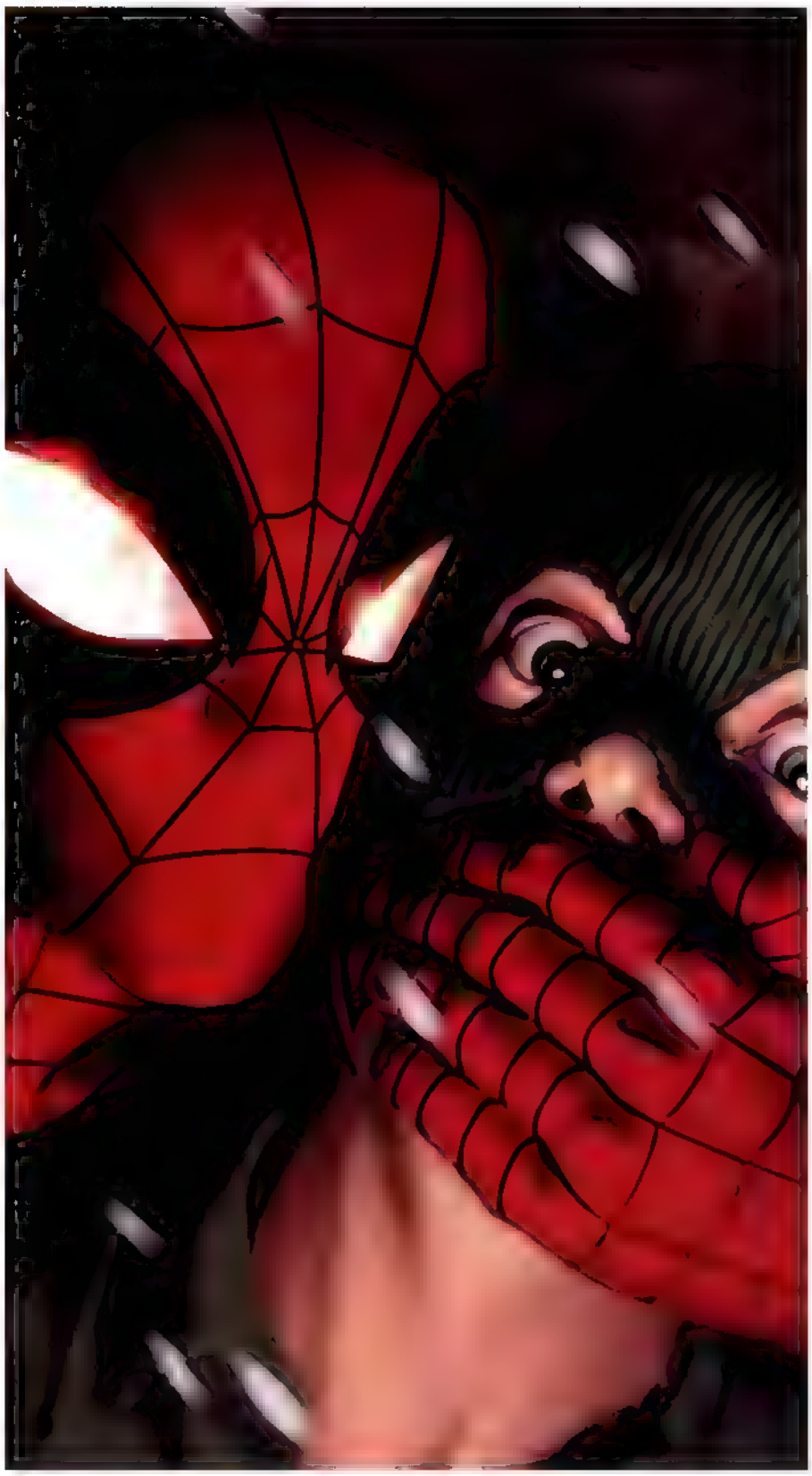


'NUFF SAID

Marvel shuts the hell up

It was a bad month for letterers. Marvel went silent in December as "'Nuff Said" month eliminated all words and captions from Marvel comics. Marvel President Bill Jemas called for the wordless month for one simple reason.

"[Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada] and I had it up to our eyeballs with flashbacks and flashbacks within flashbacks," Jemas says. "If you're going to do a silent story, it has to be 100% action. That's the kind of shot in the arm we needed as creators."



Art by Greg Horn (left) and Kaare Andrews (above)

THE 100 GREATEST MARVELS OF ALL TIME

THE ENVELOPE, PLEASE

Tally marks work better than hanging charts for 'Greatest Marvel' book

Ask fans what their favorite Marvel book is, and you'll get a response. Lots of responses.

That's what happened when Associate Editor Brian Smith spearheaded The *100 Greatest Marvels of All Time*. Fans were asked to name their favorite Marvel comics, with reader choices commemorated with a series of special reprints.

"I received over 10,000 votes, with five entries each—the ballot told people to vote for their five favorites," Smith says. "So that's, 50,000 votes between e-mail and mail-in. And the window for voting was just the month of February—a mere 28 days."

Once received, the votes were tabulated by the prestigious accounting firm of...Brian Smith?

"There wasn't any tabulation mechanism, even for the online voting,"Smith laughs. "I personally hand-counted all the votes. I had a notebook where I'd just count 'em out—four lines and then a slash through them. You know—the tally marks. That was it. That was my system."

When the smoke cleared and the number 1 book was published in December, it was an old favorite, and no surprise—*Amazing Fantasy* #15, featuring the origin and first appearance of Spider-Man. "It's a pretty good choice," Smith says, "but they were all pretty good."

The top ten:

1. *Amazing Fantasy* #15
2. *Fantastic Four* #1
3. *Uncanny X-Men* #137
4. *Giant Size X-Men* #1
5. *X-Men* #1
6. *Amazing Spider-Man* (Vol. 1) #121
7. *Avengers* (Vol. 1) #4
8. *Uncanny X-Men* #1
9. *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1
10. *Wolverine* #75

Spider-Man art by John Romita Sr.,
Daredevil art by Joe Quesada,
Avengers art by Stuart Immonen,
Fantastic Four art by Alan Davis,
and Wolverine art by Alex Ross

RAMOS/TAUCHER

SILENCE IS GOLDEN

Everyone hates mimes—except Paul Jenkins

The all-silent 'Nuff Said month was a godsend for *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* creators Paul Jenkins and Mark Buckingham...in more ways than one!

"I'm so much happier they did an experiment with storytelling rather than saying, 'Here's your alien crossover for this year. Now make your book fit it and write a story about it,'" Jenkins says.

But more than that, there was the chance to tackle the scourge of urban-dwellers everywhere—the dreaded mimes.

"When Mark and I first came on *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*, many people told me, 'Well, you can't really do Spider-Man anymore. The character is done, over, finished.' That really pissed me off, 'cause it's just not true," Jenkins remembered.

So Jenkins and Buckingham turned their attentions to an old Spidey staple. "One of the things you have to do is give Spider-Man his sense of humor," Jenkins explains. "So we asked ourselves, 'What can we do to show that in this issue?' One of the things we came up with was having him fight a gang of mimes. I swear, Mark and I spent two hours on the phone just laughing...and we must have come up with a year's worth of mime stories. You'd imagine these moments where they'd all have silencers on their guns, and they'd even have a tank with a silencer. We said we'd have to get back to these mime stories, just 'cause they were so much fun."

Okay, it was goofy. Actually doing a mime story was just a pipe dream—until 'Nuff Said provided the perfect opportunity. Silent month, silent villains!

"The first time Marvel said to all the writers, 'We want you to do a silent issue,' I jumped up and said, 'We're doing it! We're doing the mimes, finally!" Jenkins recalls. "I called Mark and told him, 'Mate, here's the chance to do all those stupid little mime things we wanted to do. And get paid for it."

Art by Humberto Ramos and Wayne Faucher

CABLE-READY

Marvel's soldier-of-the-future becomes a soldier again

Cable, the mutant soldier who came from the future with a mission to save the present, almost didn't make it to his 100th birthday party. Seems Marvel President Bill Jemas and Marvel Editor in Chief Joe Quesada were of two different minds about the book.

"When Bill and Joe came on, Bill wanted to keep the book, but Joe hated it," Editor Mark Powers says. "*Cable* represented all the alternate history and time-travel stuff Joe despised. It had nothing to do with the current creators, just more to do with the character's make-up."

So Powers came up with a different take. "I suggested playing him like Che Guevara, cutting him off from the rest of the X-Men," Powers says. "When he started, he was a revolutionary, a soldier. The thought was, let's make him that again."

Politically-charged comic writer Howard Chaykin was approached to do the title, and he accepted. But Chaykin quickly had to hand it off to his friend and co-writer, David Tischman. Then, Tischman suggested an artist who could capture the flair of a war book...because he had lived it.

Igor Kordey had lived through four years of war in Croatia, fighting in the Croatian army during some of that time. The two Tischman/Kordey stories, running between *Cable* #97 and #104, riveted readers with their stark reality. winning new converts to the title and setting the table for Eisner-nominated writer Darko Macan to take those threads and run with them by making *Cable*, well, *Cable* once again.

"We went back to the roots of the character, without the confusing continuity," Powers says. "The book hasn't been the same since."

Art by Igor Kordey

MERRY X-MAS,

And to all, a good night

Marvel announced a Christmas present for its readers to be delivered eight months later.

Fantastic Four #60 on sale in August 2002, would debut the new creative team of writer Mark Waid and penciler Mike Wieringo. In a playful slap at AOL Comics' highly successful *Batman: The 10-Cent Adventure*, Marvel announced that *FF* #60 would cost a mere nine cents.

Read the announcement below carefully, 'cause AOL Comics principals Paul Levitz and Bob Wayne just might appear in Marvel's "Christmas card," along with CrossGen Comics founder Mark Alessi. And don't just be careful, wear a hard hat, 'cause it's rainin' in-jokes:

'TWAS A MARVEL KNIGHT BEFORE X-MAS

'Twas the night before Christmas and all through the House
Not an editor was stirring, not Tom, Mike nor Ralph,
Grayhaven and Splash, *Wizard* and Newsarama
Were all waiting for Marvel's next melodrama.

Levitz and Wayne all snug in their bed,
With visions of reprints and books that they'd shred
And Jemas in straitjacket and Joe Q with the lock,
Had just settled down for new schemes they'd concoct.

From the Sunshine State there came such a chatter,
That Joe Q made a call to find what's the matter.
Alessi was shouting, "No, no, nobody quits,"
But you know what they say: if the Sigil fits!

The fans started posting the rumors du jour,
But Q and J knew that one thing was for sure
As sure as a fanboy loves a bad girly,
Came a holiday gift just a little bit early!

A writer with wit just as sharp as a blade,
They knew in an instant it must be Mark Waid.
More rapid than Quicksilver his characters came,
And he whistled, and shouted, and called them by name—

Now Suzy, now Surfer, now Richards, now Ben,
On Namor, on Johnny, on Doom and Mole Men!
To the top of the House of Ideas they flew,
To regain the glory and praise they once knew!

And that's when it hit them, with reckless abandon,
Joe Q and Bill J had a great gift for all fandom!
A comic book starring the Fantastic Four,
For nine cents, just nine, and not one penny more!

MARVEL STYLE

And then in a twinkling, it came rather nifty,
That the nine-cent comic should be issue sixty!
So in August '02 retail lives will be merry,
Three-digit IQs won't be necessary!

('Cause retailers want to punch Bill on the nose,
Bill wanted it known that that last joke was Joe's.
And though it sounds funny with rhymes done with skill,
Joe wanted it known it really was Bill's.)

Now back to our story because it's the time to be merry,
Lest we want the nine-cent news release to get buried!
What more besides Waid could we wrap with a bow?
Oh, hey, don't look now, it's Mike Wieringo!

In 2002, they'll make the FF idols
Unless Brian Bendis writes 50 new titles!
A bargain so huge for a book so immense,
Who could ever believe it's merely nine cents?

So don't listen to gossip or false accusation,
Don't spend your ten pennies on cheap imitations!
For others will come and others will go,
With seven or six-cent ideas that blow!

As for ten-penny books by Da Competition,
It's clear to any good math-e-matician,
To pay for the companies bought (there were many),
The AOL giant needs that extra penny.

At Marvel we wanted to spread Christmas cheer,
With all of our fans who we worship so dear!
So we leave all ye faithful, though it may sound clichéd,
With some closing remarks we heard from Mark Waid.

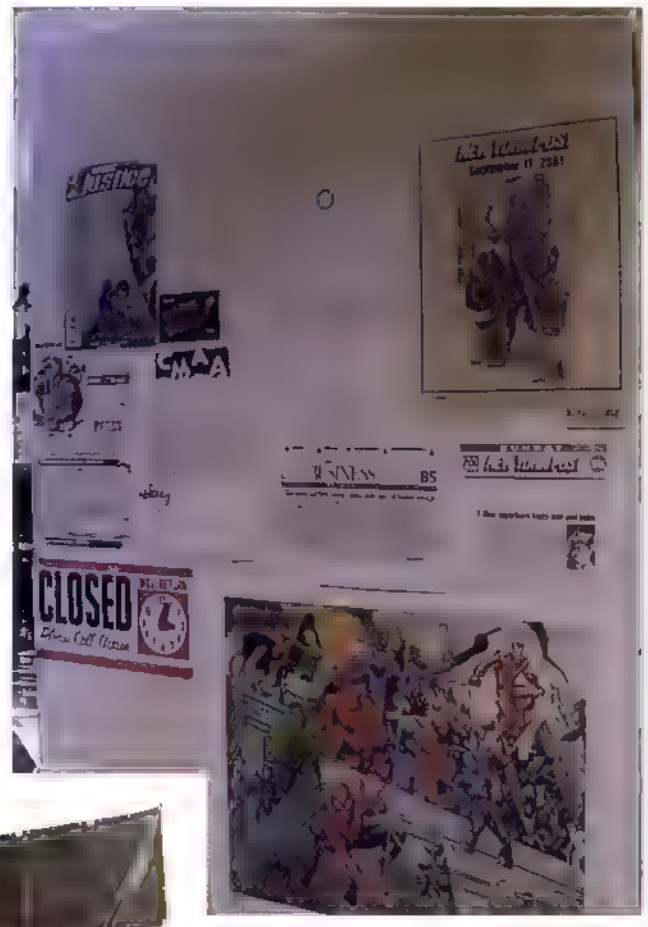
As he revved the Fantasticar, map marked for home,
And prepared to fly off to the Negative Zone,
I heard him exclaim to Q, quite elated,
"Merry Christmas to all...
...and keep Jemas sedated!"

Art by Mike Wieringo

A YEAR INSIDE THE HOUSE OF IDEAS

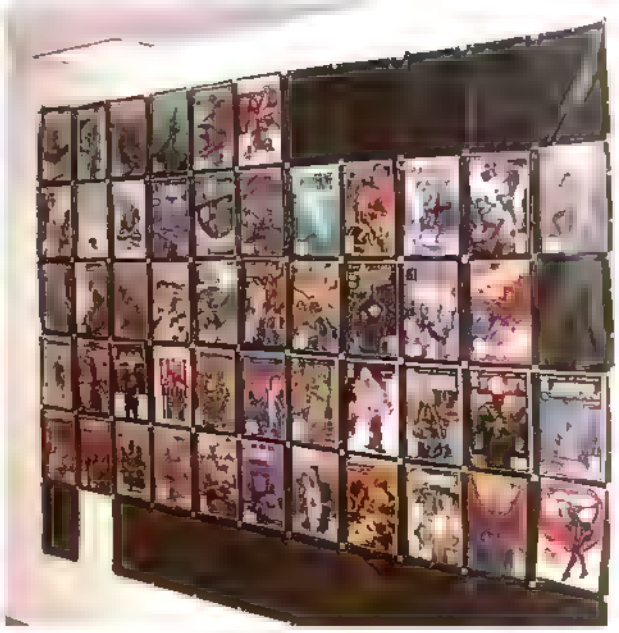
The broken Marvel neon light.

Stuart Moore receives a fax. (Axel swears it wasn't him)

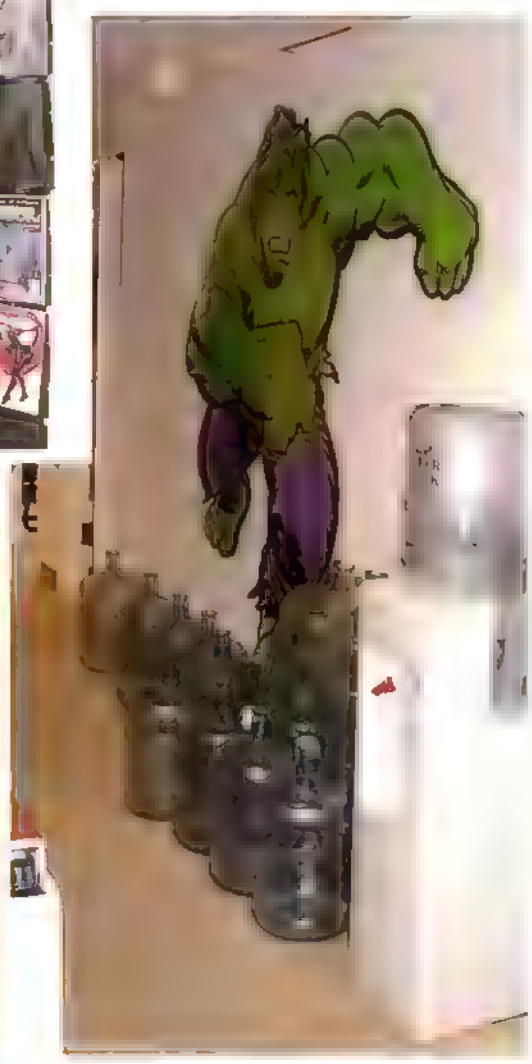


The Editor in Chief's door.

Axel Alonso's wall of junk and miscellany.



The legendary cover wall



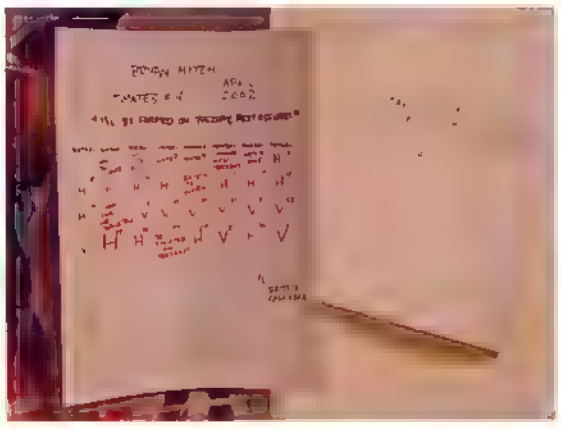
Hulk says, "One cup per person, per day!"

The Marvel classic lean...er...stand ups.

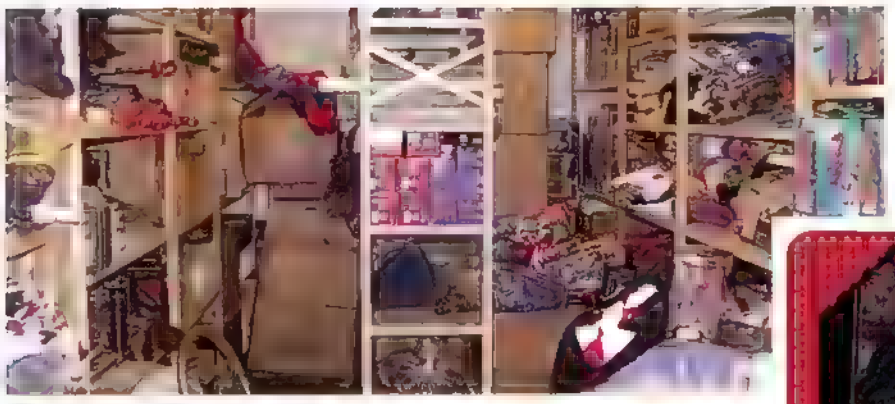
Editorial Row and the not-so-complete office walls.

'Styrofjolnir' (Thor's back-up hammer).

Official FF movie prop.

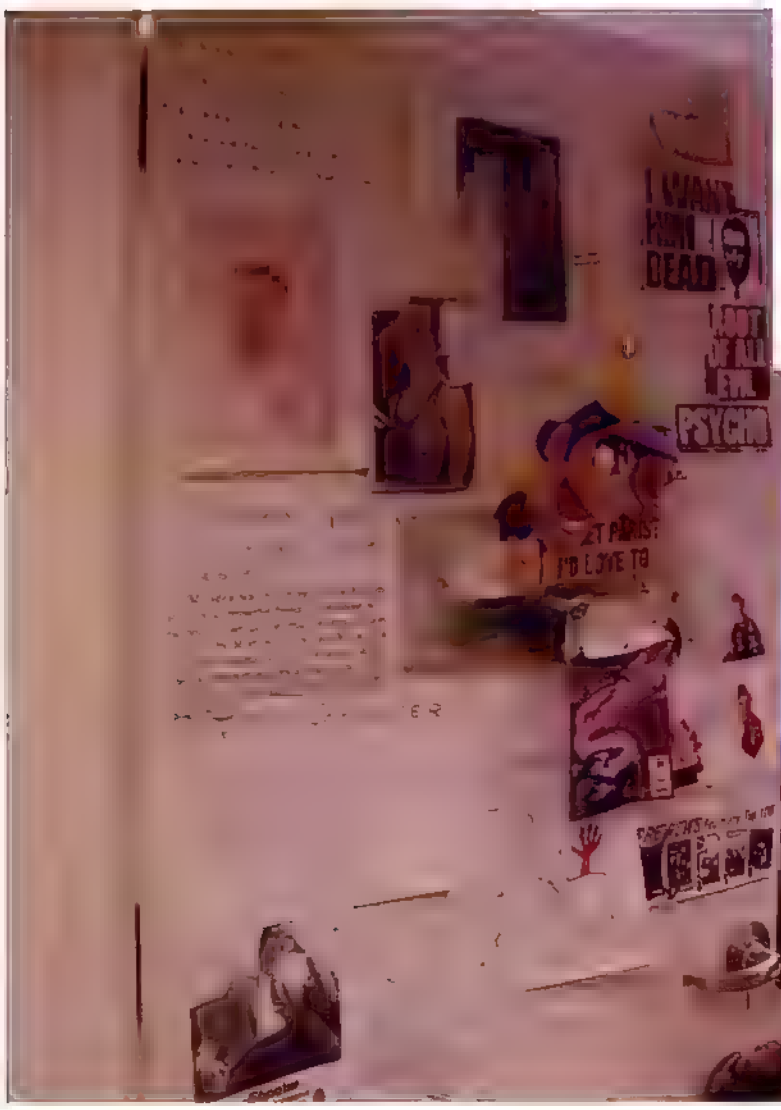


The Ultimate Office presents the Ultimate Hitch

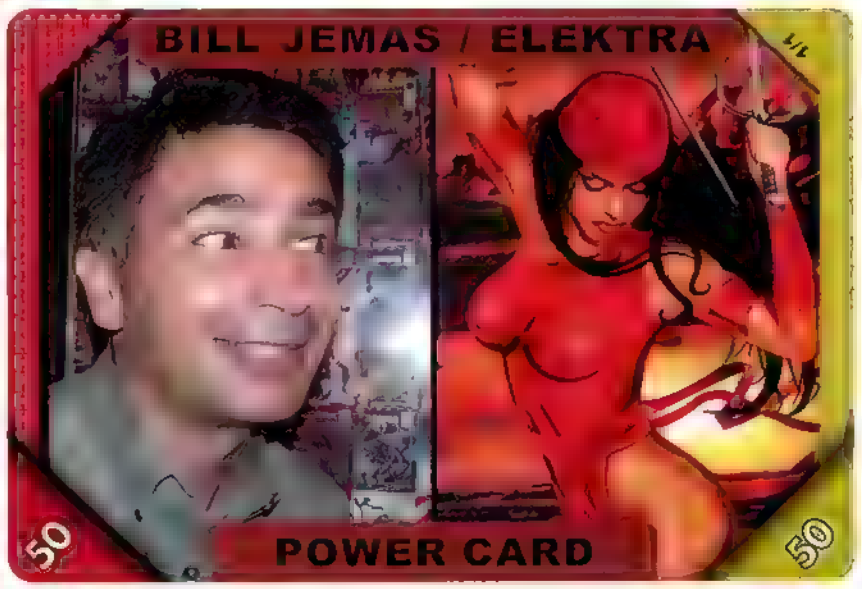


Marvel organization at its finest.

The New Marvel still has a spot for Mark Gruenwald.



Lesson number one: Never cross Ralph Macchio.



Elektra 'ReCharges' Bill.

I'LL HAVE IT TO YOU BY THE END OF THE DAY!
NO CONTRACTS TODAY!
YOU'LL HAVE T ON YOUR DESK WHEN YOU COME IN TOMORROW MORNING
I AM STAYING LATE TO FINISH THAT TONIGHT
IT'S ON MY DESK SOMEWHERE I HAVE GOT TO FIND IT

Enter the Legal Department.

AFTERWORD by Joe Quesada

I guess since I'm the last page or last word of this dubious publication it's really up to me to find something interesting to say that hasn't already been touched upon. I could go on about what a long, strange, great trip it's been but that's kind of boring. Especially after we've made it a hallmark of the new Marvel to say as many outrageous and controversial things as possible.

So what's really left to be said? What's really important?

I guess I could say that through all that's happened in this very short portion of Marvel history, there is still so much further to go, and a lot of that has to do with all of us and our attitude towards this medium we love.

I remember early on in my Marvel Knights days I had sent Stan Lee an e-mail asking advice on one thing or another. No matter how much of a pest I may be, Stan has always been nothing short of fantastic and a fountain of wisdom! However, this one day he sent back my e-mail with a big redline correction over the words 'comic book.' For the life of me I couldn't figure out what Stan was getting at; as far as I could see it was spelled correctly. Oh man, horrors of horrors, what had I done to get a big, fat, redline from "The Man"? Finally, I couldn't take it anymore, so I called Stan up directly. He chuckled a bit and then explained that he has his own spelling for comic book that, unfortunately, neither Webster's nor Oxford's Dictionary had recognized as of yet. "Joe," he said in his best P.T. Barnum voice, "comic book is actually one word, 'comicbook,' and I expect you to spell it that way from now on!" His explanation was simple, a "comic book" implied a book that contained comedic or humorous material, much in the same way that a "history book" is about history and a "cook book" is about cooking. Now while the moniker "comic" may be true for some books in our medium (some less intentional than others), it certainly isn't what the bulk of our industry-wide content is about. Stan suggested that what we do as a medium needs another name, hence his use of the single word "comicbook" to describe properly the full range of genres contained within our multicolored pages. A "comicbook" being something completely unique unto itself.

So, it begs the question, "What's up with these people that like to refer to comicbooks as pamphlets?" I mean, could we demean what we do even more than by calling it that? Here we have good ol' Stan Lee looking for just the right words to define this beautiful craft while others spend their time looking for ways to degrade it. I have to admit, very few things send my blood pressure rising like that word. Here we are, working our tails off on a daily basis to bring our fans the best in monthly entertainment and some idiot calls them a pamphlet.

I'm sure there are many of you who have heard me talk about "The Loser's Song." You know, the battle cry of those that *can't* in a world that *does*.

Well, I'll tell you what I've found. It seems that the people who refer to monthly comicbooks as pamphlets are those that can't figure out how to sell their monthly books. Okay, I get it now, since I can't compete on a monthly basis and since I do better with trade paperbacks, let me demean the monthlies in an effort to raise the value of my reprint volumes. This is incredibly sad to me, especially since I've actually heard a publisher of a well-known company refer to his own monthly comics in this way. However, looking at his monthly sales figures, I can certainly see why.

We suffer a tremendous image problem in comicbooks, that's why I can't figure out why we do the things we do sometimes. Would I be justified in calling trade paperbacks "bound reprints"? Or maybe "brochures" is more appropriate? Perhaps the next great graphic novel should be referred to as a "giant-sized funny book"? Heck, the possibilities to demean our best efforts are endless and easy. What takes *work* is to do what Stan did. And that's to find a better way to catch the mouse. Okay, so maybe "comicbook" isn't the solution to our problems, but I'll tell you what, at least the logic behind it was of a positive nature. And maybe, maybe that's what's really left to be said on this last page of this self-serving tome.

Whether you agree or not with what went down in the last year and a half covered by this book, whether you find it funny, loathsome, intelligent, showboating, amazing, headline grabbing, immature or even necessary, the one thing I can vouch for is that it was done in an effort to bring a fresh and even more importantly, fun point of view to this world of sequential storytelling that I love so much. It's a point of view that I found sorely lacking when I took over as EIC.

Say what you will, but I love comics! I love Marvel Comics, I love AOL Comics, I love Indy comics, heck, I even love Crossgen Comics! I just love every single aspect of this medium and as long as people continue telling stories with pictures and words, I'll keep on loving them. Sure, I poke fun at the competition, but in that way I'm no different than the average comic fan. I have a passion for what I do and I've been rewarded by having the greatest job in the world and, on occasions like this, the eyes and ears of those that care to listen.

So what's really left to be said on this last page? What's really important?

It's simple.

Thank you.

JQ
EEK!

MARVEL® YEAR IN REVIEW: 2000-2001, FANBOYS AND BADGIRLS, BILL & JOE'S MARVELOUS ADVENTURE

...continued from front cover flap

MK / KNIGHTS = Marvel Knights, an independent imprint packaging books for Marvel, founded by Joe Quesada prior to his becoming EIC.

WIZARD = *Wizard: The Comics Magazine*, the comic industry's leading fan / news source.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim McLauchlin (yes, that's spelled right) has been a professional writer for 14 years, having gotten his start as a sportswriter where he first met Bill Jemas. He's been working in the comics field for 10 years at Wizard Entertainment, where he's served in every capacity from Promotions and Publicity Manager to Contributing Editor to third baseman on the company softball team.

McLauchlin is also a frequent contributor to *FHM* magazine, and the president of the non-profit organization ACTOR (A Commitment To Our Roots) which provides financial assistance to elderly comic creators in need.

McLauchlin was born in Saint Paul, MN, in 1968. He currently lives in Los Angeles with his fiancée, Lisa Marie, and two dogs. Two cats also live there, but we won't talk about that. Jim would also like us to mention one last time, that all references to DC Comics as AOL Comics were at the request (read: insistence) of Bill Jemas and Joe Quesada.

Reference materials used in researching this volume came from the comic book news website *Newsarama.com*.

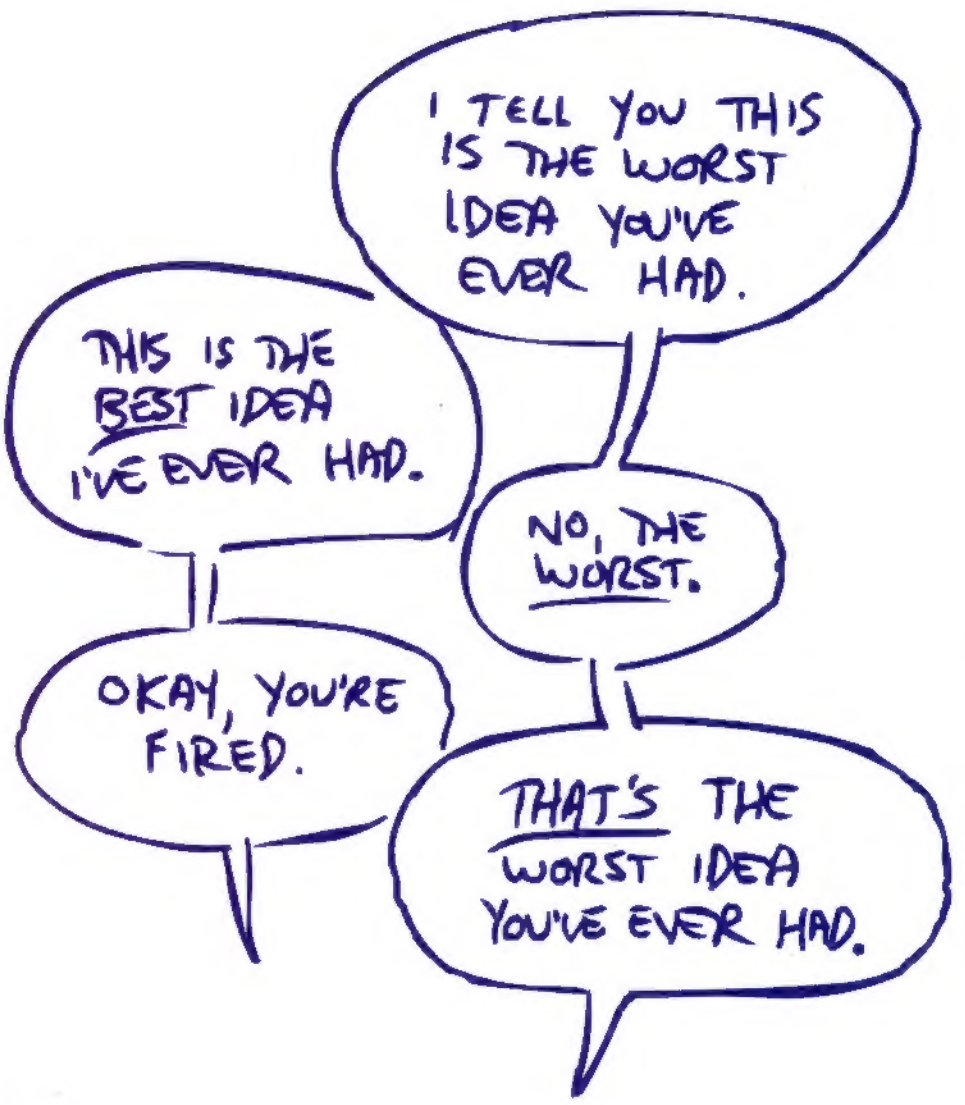
Special thanks to: Lynne Yoshii; Jenny Lee; Jen Grunwald; Nate Cosby; Hi-Fi Colour Design; Sarah Fan, Jeff Youngquist and the Special Projects crew; the entire editorial crew of Marvel; and the folks at AOL Comics for their help with *JLA/Avengers*.

Front cover art by Kaare Andrews
Back cover art by Tim Finn

Spotlighting the *finest* illustrations, examining the *most* controversial decisions, and *revealing* the behind-the-scenes scandals surrounding comics' *greatest* comeback!

Out of the ashes of bankruptcy, comes *Bill & Joe's Marvelous Adventure*! A $25.99 (cheap!), somewhat self-indulgent look back at one of comics' most tumultuous periods!

JOE—
BACK COVER IDEA FOR THE "BILL + JOE" HC. IT'S YOURS.
—TIM


I TELL YOU THIS IS THE WORST IDEA YOU'VE EVER HAD.
THIS IS THE BEST IDEA I'VE EVER HAD.
NO, THE WORST.
OKAY, YOU'RE FIRED.
THAT'S THE WORST IDEA YOU'VE EVER HAD.

(WHITE BG)

JOE Q. DRAWING

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